



Glenn Roberts

Anson Mills

Columbia, South Carolina

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Kate Medley: I'll kick things off by saying this is Kate Medley interviewing Glenn Roberts behind the—what car wash?

[0:00:06.7]

Glenn Roberts: Constan.

[0:00:07.6]

Kate Medley: Constan Car Wash, at the world headquarters of Anson Mills in Columbia, South Carolina. It's November 1st, 2017. Then I'll turn it to you and get you to introduce yourself.

[0:00:23.6]

Glenn Roberts: I'm Glenn Roberts. I'm in Columbia, South Carolina, today at the home base for Anson Mills, which is located behind Constan Car Wash in beautiful Columbia, South Carolina, and we're humble and not even proud.

[0:00:41.5]

Kate Medley: And what's your birth date?

[0:00:42.8]

Glenn Roberts: I was born January 14th, 1948, so I'm a lazy Capricorn.

[0:00:53.2]

Kate Medley: Introduce us to what is Anson Mills. What do y'all do?

[0:00:57.2]

Glenn Roberts: Anson Mills, succinctly, is a group of farmers that come together with some real smart women, Catherine Schopfer, my partner, being the head of that, Kay Rentschler, my darling wife, being the second creative person in that net. We're all a group of people who have a shared common goal to feed people really, really great food. Most of it happened prior to the Industrial Revolution, and we're following the techniques that you would have used then and cheating some with modern machinery.

[0:01:39.3]

Kate Medley: Great. I'm going to bring you back to Anson Mills later, but let's, for now, start with where you're from. Tell us about your growing-up years in California.

[0:01:54.5]

Glenn Roberts: Well, I was born in Delaware, by the way, but I don't remember any of that because we left when I was really young. My dad was a musician from the time he was very, very young. He always wanted to be a professional musician, and my mother was as well. My dad was a tenor vocalist of some repute and a trumpet player and a decent keyboard artist, and my mother was a very good keyboard artist and an alto, and both of them had stunning voices. They both ended up doing pro gigs with Robert Shaw, so that dates me, because some people don't even remember who that is. But if you were into vocal arts, Robert Shaw was fairly revolutionary. He taught at Yale. He also was

conductor of the Atlanta Symphony prior to his death. He was a pretty amazing force in my life growing up, too, because I got to sit at the knee of everyone in Robert Shaw's orbit, which included Jascha Heifetz and all of the conductors in the [Eugene] Ormandy era, which was André Previn, people like that.

So from Delaware, my dad was chasing his dream to be two things: one, a great musician, and, two, a world-class nature photographer. We left Delaware, apparently, and my consciousness appeared as he was on assignment with *Grand Canyon* magazine. I remember the celebration when he got the gig. So he became a guy who has a five-year-old kid, who'd become a six-year-old kid and a seven-year-old kid, dragging a graphics assembly with a long bellows to do macro photography in the middle of nowhere, in the deserts and stuff, in the surrounds in Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Kansas, Oklahoma, just doing weird shots for *Grand Canyon* magazine. Why he decided to do that, I don't know, but that was a five-year stint. Then he really got struck with the idea he needed to stop being a photographer and start being a musician full-time. That's when we ended up going to California, where I started to actually remember what I was doing when I was growing up.

[0:04:16.2]

Kate Medley: What were your parents' names?

[0:04:18.0]

Glenn Roberts: Jack Roberts, and my mother was Mary Clifton Roberts. My mother grew up here, only forty-five miles from here, in Aiken, South Carolina, during the Great

Depression, so that dates them. Prior to World War II, her family was very, very wealthy in the horseracing business, and then the Depression hit and her family was very, very, very unwealthy. She went from being a kid with roadsters to match her clothes, to trying to figure out what they were going to eat for dinner, and she remembers that her dad never recovered from that experience because his fall was much more jarring than hers, and that happened to her about age twelve or thirteen.

She moved to Aiken when she was fourteen, and she was running a jockey and trainers boardinghouse there, doing all the cooking with two black women who really taught her how to cook, right? So they had been working for her dad forever. She moved in because she couldn't afford to hire the third black woman to run the kitchen, to keep up in the boardinghouse. She said that during the Depression—I remember this; I'll never forget this—she fed more people out the back door than the front door, and that the source of her best ingredients were all foraged, they were all wild, because no one had any money. They couldn't buy anything. If they could grow something, they were probably eating it themselves or cashing it, and they weren't cashing it to my mother, because they could get better money at the mercantile. So she was trading for wild mushrooms and stuff like that. So the cuisine that my mother inherited was Southern with a heavy emphasis on hunting and foraging, which is pretty extraordinary to have a parent that has that much acuity. I was *really* lucky there.

She was also a confectioner. That's what she learned when she was in Aiken. She became a professional confectioner. My mother was in the generation that was still sort of clinging to the notion that Sunday supper was supposed to be only dessert, for health reasons, and I loved that, right? And that's the way we grew up. So Sunday

supper was strawberry shortcake and whatever you wanted to drink. It was so cool. We could have wine watered down three times, but we couldn't have straight wine, or we could have coffee, but couldn't have it black, only with tons of milk in it. So we could have all the grown-up drinks as long as we watered them down. My sister and I would cheat sometimes and not do it when no one was looking. It was really fun.

[0:06:54.4]

Kate Medley: Who's your sister?

[0:06:55.3]

Glenn Roberts: Hollis Anne Roberts. She still lives in San Diego with her husband, who's into Eastern medicine now. He's taking his PhD in it. Holly is my older sister, and she was the coolest person on Earth and the smartest person in the neighborhood, still is the smartest person in the neighborhood and the coolest person on Earth. We call her Saint Holly because she's never, ever done anything bad. She's *horrible*, right? I got all the bad genes and she got all the good ones.

[0:07:27.9]

Kate Medley: Was there another sibling in the mix?

[0:07:29.3]

Glenn Roberts: No, that's it. Just me and Holly, brother and sister.

[0:07:33.5]

Kate Medley: So you moved from Delaware to—

[0:07:35.4]

Glenn Roberts: To Colorado Springs, Colorado, and that's where my dad was doing the gig with *Grand Canyon* magazine. He was on assignment all the time, so we were on the road a lot, because I wasn't in school. I wasn't even in kindergarten then. They'd dump me at church sometimes to babysit, but Dad was dragging me around to all those shoots, so it was kind of fun to see.

[0:07:59.0]

Kate Medley: It sounds kind of cool.

[0:08:00.0]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah. Holly was in school, I remember that, and I barely remember any of that stuff. I got bit by a chipmunk, whatever, "Ouch! My finger! Ah!"

[Demonstrates] That's about it. But Colorado Springs, I don't remember any of the layout. I remember trying to hike with my dad up in Pikes Peak. That was difficult.

[0:08:19.0]

Kate Medley: And then California?

[0:08:20.5]

Glenn Roberts: Then California direct.

[0:08:22.1]

Kate Medley: And where in California?

[0:08:23.4]

Glenn Roberts: Went immediately to Hillcrest, which is right next to the San Diego Zoo, very cool, and so my sister and I sort of grew up in the deteriorated botanical gardens from the World's Fair that was in San Diego that was still there and still intact but totally abandoned, so it was really creepy. And my sister had this kind of interest in all things geological and plant life. That's how she ended up in homeopathic medicine and being a critical care nurse. Oh, by the way, Saint Holly became the number one. She got best nurse in California. That's going some. She never wanted to be a doctor, which broke my dad's and my mom's heart, because she had it in her. She was smart enough. She just didn't want to do it. She said, "No, I want to be a nurse," and she was, like, dedicated to it. She said, "I don't want to be a doctor. Doctors tell nurses what to do, and then nurses ignore them and do what's supposed to be done." Right? That was her take on that, and that's kind of interesting now that her husband is a doctor, right, and she tells him what to do, too, and me too. [Laughter]

[0:09:29.3]

Kate Medley: Somebody's got to make the rules.

[0:09:31.6]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah. So it was all in San Diego. Hillcrest was next to the mile-long—the first mall in the United States was Hillcrest to El Cajon. It was the longest retail strip in America. That was frightening. So, that urban environment. Next to Hillcrest was a colonial era village. It had been there forever. It was an Indian dwelling prior to settlement by the Spanish, so there was lots of adobes on the cliff and stuff like that. My wealthy friends on the edge of Hillcrest were right on the edge of Mission Valley looking down into the Valley, and there was nothing out there but a cattle farm and the mission. That's why it was called Mission Valley.

[0:10:16.5]

Kate Medley: What was the food of your youth?

[0:10:19.8]

Glenn Roberts: We didn't call it Mexican, interestingly enough. We called it Spanish, and I don't know why. But my food growing up was orchards, so there was a lot of Hispanic workers in orchards, and we didn't see the division. Neither did we detect any oppressive behavior, and I know it was there, but my sister and I, because my sister was fluent in Spanish and I was sort of okay, my sister was the entrée into all that because she's super adventurous. So we'd go out in the orchards and hang with the workers out there, and then they'd invite us to have whatever they were cooking, which was very generous of them. Most of it was handmade tortillas made with real coarse masa, which you never see anymore. It looks like alabaster and granite and marble, different patterns

in the masa. I remember looking at tortillas, going, “Man, that’s crazy. Look at that. This is like the bathroom marble top on our vanity at home.” Then another one, I’d be going, “Is this like the granite at the bank?”

And my sister would be going, “Shut up. Just eat your lunch.”

So it was Hispanic food. That was the first two or three years, and then later, because my parents were musicians and Friday nights, all day Saturday, all day Sunday was performance time and/or rehearsal time, I’d get dumped at the mission with Native Americans at that mission who were still gardening and farming for the Jesuits there. *That* was cool, and I don’t know what you’d want to call that food, because it was a hybrid of Native food, some Hispanic influences, and then some Roman stuff.

The garden was spectacular. I wasn’t so much interested in the garden as I was all the kids that hung there, because all the Native children would be at the mission because there was no one to take care of them, so they’d come to work with their parents. It was women making masa from scratch there and growing all the herbs and stuff. I remember people talking about one side of a plant versus the other side of the plant, and the herb on this side was different, but it was *way* over my head. I wasn’t really interested in it, but I remember them talking about it.

I remember the kids making fun of me because I liked making masa and that was “girl’s work.” I was from that age when there was such a thing as “girl’s work,” whatever that means. So I guess I usually say this a lot, I’m part Native American girl, even though there’s no such thing as a Native American part-Native girl, because I was raised with Native girls. I didn’t want to go play with the Native guys, maybe because

I'd thought they'd beat me up, they were much more athletic than me, but I really had fun hanging with the girls.

[0:13:09.0]

Kate Medley: Who was the cook in your house?

[0:13:11.6]

Glenn Roberts: Mom.

[0:13:13.0]

Kate Medley: And was the food—was it utilitarian or what was the—

[0:13:20.2]

Glenn Roberts: Well, my current relationship is very, very much—and I love my darling wife, Kay, dearly. I have and we are in the same exact relationship that my mother and I had, which was, “You have no special talent as a cook, Glenn. This is tragic, because I love food and I know you love food. Why can't you cook?” So I was relegated to cooking for the dog. We had food that would move from sublime high Italian, haute French, all the way down to the gutter and back, depending what mood my mother was in, because she'd done it all. She was a hotelier. As a kid, she started in a boardinghouse and then moved on up and supported her art habit and singing, which she couldn't make any money during the Depression, working in hotels. So she knew this stuff inside out. She was also a restaurateur, and for a while I helped her in that. I got a

busing job when I was in the fifth grade, full-time, seven nights a week, child labor free in my mom's restaurant. [Laughter]

[0:14:32.1]

Kate Medley: That was her restaurant?

[0:14:32.6]

Glenn Roberts: It was her restaurant.

[0:14:33.6]

Kate Medley: And what was her restaurant?

[0:14:34.9]

Glenn Roberts: Called Ma Maison Marie, and she had one there, and then some rich person who was coming back from Jai-Alai in Tijuana said, "You want to build one up in Marin County? I want one of these." He didn't say it like that. I'm sure no one talks stupidly like that in that era, but I remember he was a jerk, but he had a lot of bucks. The next thing I know, I'm driving around in what's now the Napa Valley. I don't know what people were calling it then, probably the Napa Valley. But I was a squirt, and Mom had those big gallon glass jugs with the little finger hole in the screw cap. We had a whole trunkful of those, and we'd be going to wineries and filling them up and using it as house wine. So we had to go get our own house wine back in the day.

So she had two of those for a while, and I was the bus kid, and they'd call me in the kitchen. I got beat over the head a lot, only French spoken in there, and it was nasty, right? And I didn't learn anything about culinary stuff, but she was amazing. The candy season started about this time of year. Right now it's just November 1. So, well before Thanksgiving we start throwing candy, and she would be doing full confectionary top to bottom, dozens of different kinds of candy that we'd send out all over the United States to relatives and friends, and my sister and I would help with that. Then she was always prepping stuff. She used lots of stock. She'd cook with a lot of different wines, which my sister and I would nip at when she wasn't looking. So it was good.

[0:16:02.1]

Kate Medley: But the candy was separate from the restaurant?

[0:16:04.3]

Glenn Roberts: Candy was totally separate from the restaurant. It was never commercialized. It's just something she did because she was raised in that. That Southern, that confectionary thing, that's the only thing that white women got to own. Anybody that was really conscious—this is my opinion even now, that if you're a white woman, you're incredibly accomplished—sorry to all you wonderful women mature chefs out there, if you're not Mashama Bailey, you need to go to take some lessons, because the knack is the black hand on the skillet. My mom had some of it, she didn't have all of it, but that's where she came from.

[0:16:43.6]

Kate Medley: I read about some of your chemistry experiments.

[0:16:46.6]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah?

[0:16:48.6]

Kate Medley: You want to tell us about those?

[0:16:50.0]

Glenn Roberts: Well, it's nerd stuff, silicon analogs of glycine. I mean, who the hell does that? The whole premise, I got to go to the National Science Fair because I decided that there must be another life form in the universe based on silicon, not on carbon. I have no idea why I thought that. It makes no sense now. It didn't even make any sense then. But I did all the chemical experiments using the empirical method like I'm supposed to as a scientist, and I happened to have done it at—the first concepts I ran by all the postdocs at General Atomics, because I was the cleanup boy in the labs out there. I got to go to the labs. Instead of having to go to high school, I got to go out there and hang at the labs and clean up stuff from their experiments and watch them work and hang out.

I have no idea to this minute why I did it, and I did this, by the way, once we moved to Montana, because that's where we moved after. I didn't want to actually do a science fair project in San Diego. I don't even know—I'd already taken all the courses

when we moved to Montana from San Diego, so I think I was just bored and wanted something to do, and my science teacher up there said, “Do you know this? Do you know this? Do you know this?” And I said, “Yes, yes, I took all those courses.”

Then he looked at where I’d been. He said, “Did you actually go to UCSD before they actually put the chemistry department together?”

I said, “Yeah, but I wasn’t going to school there. I just went to work with Harold Urey.”

He said, “Harold Urey?” Because he was at the University of Montana at the time, too, by the way, and I didn’t know that. He said, “You mean Dr. Urey?”

[0:18:25.1]

Kate Medley: I think there’s a Urey Hall.

[0:18:26.5]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah, there is. He said, “You mean Dr. Urey, the one here?”

I said, “Yeah, the cosmologist, the guy that talks about the origins of the universe. I like his stuff.”

And the guy’s going, “What grade are you in?”

I said, “Tenth.”

And he said, “Why are you talking about Urey?”

I said, “Well, I like his stuff. Don’t you?” And I didn’t know he was in Montana.

And he said, “Well, what do you want to do then?”

I said, “Is Anaconda here? Let’s do a science fair experiment with aluminum.”

[Laughter] So I got to go work in the Anaconda labs and did a Science Fair project with aluminum, which went absolutely nowhere. And the whole time I was there, I kept talking about silicon. I said, “It’s all stupid.” I have no idea why.

[0:19:07.9]

Kate Medley: Glenn Roberts—confounding people for years.

[0:19:10.3]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah, really, with no purpose and no reason. At least we feed people now, instead of feeding people stuff you might have eaten on Mars in another life.

[Laughter]

[0:19:21.7]

Kate Medley: So, leading up to college, it was science and music were your two big things?

[0:19:30.8]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah, mm-hmm. And tennis and surfing. Not too many girls.

[0:19:36.9]

Kate Medley: Kalispell.

[0:19:37.6]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah, surfing in Kalispell, behind the big boats. You never did that? Hell, yeah. B.J. Lupton and me. Who else? Cheryl—oh, God, I can't remember any of the names. All these people had big boats out on Flathead Lake, and you take your surfboard out there. There were surfers in Kalispell when I was there. I was so shocked, because I came from the surfing capital of Southern California, right, and we'd go down to **Waimus** and go surfing down there and stuff all the time when I was kid. So I thought I was going to the ends of the world. There we have world-class skiing, and in the summer I thought it would be horrible, and you could go kayaking and canoeing, and it was *ecstatically* beautiful. And those big boats, you'd pull up a wake behind those big boats, and you could surf the hell out of them. It was fun.

[0:20:27.5]

Kate Medley: People are fun out there.

[0:20:28.8]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah. It's all rec. Everything was recreation, yeah, except for the forest fires.

[0:20:37.0]

Kate Medley: University of North Carolina.

[0:20:38.2]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah.

[0:20:39.7]

Kate Medley: Tell me about that era.

[0:20:40.5]

Glenn Roberts: Randall Jarrell was there, William Burroughs. Holy crap. John Rosenthal may still be there. If you ever hear this, John, you were a big formative influence in my life. John Rosenthal was English lit professor at UNCG, which at the time was Woman's College, and I took a summer class and decided to go to Woman's College for a year because the professors—Jarell, you couldn't get in his class at Chapel Hill, but you could get into his class at Woman's College. You could get into see the artists in residence at Woman's College, but you couldn't see them at the larger schools where they were actually really making a living. They were on visiting professorships and things like that. So that atmosphere was formative. Reggae, jazz. James Taylor was there. Now I live on the Vineyard and I know all his relatives, including Kate. Hi, Kate, if you ever hear this. Carly Simon lives up there, and she was down there during that time. My girlfriend, Dunlap Culp—hi, Dunlap—in college, her roommate was Emmylou Harris. So this is *amazing* stuff. I moved from California to the South on the stories from my mother. I was very interested in civil rights. I was very interested in the ethos, really interested in the way my mother cooked, and wondered what that was like to actually live inside it, because we never visited the South. My dad didn't like the South. My dad was an inveterate Yankee.

[0:22:11.9]

Kate Medley: From?

[0:22:12.9]

Glenn Roberts: Pennsylvania, right?

[0:22:15.6]

Kate Medley: What were the years you were at Chapel Hill?

[0:22:17.7]

Glenn Roberts: From 1964 to [19]69. Took a year off to go goof around, went to the Caribbean.

[0:22:27.8]

Kate Medley: And when you say you were interested in the civil rights of the South, what does that mean?

[0:22:31.6]

Glenn Roberts: I had this perception, because in Montana there were no African descendants, even. I don't think I saw any black people at all in Montana. And we had the Navy station, Marines, and the Army in San Diego, and I was used to a multiracial environment 'cause I grew up in one. My mother always had tribal people around, she's

got that knack, and she always had black people around, too, because she loved the way they spoke, talk, acted, and whatever. And she used to get in big trouble because she had that outlook, that she wasn't what you'd expect a person from the South to be carrying that kind of just assumed racism, class distinction stuff. She was really egalitarian. And then we moved to Montana and there was nobody there but tribal people, and the tribal people tended to be off in the wilderness somewhere. They really weren't part of the fabric of anything we were doing in Kalispell.

So being at Chapel Hill, when reggae hit hard, it was super present and it blew up everything, so there were no longer any barriers to anything, and then the Klan was in the background. And then all the crap that happened in Greensboro I was seeing firsthand, and I had friends that were actually out on the line that got hurt. We had crosses burnt in my yard because I had musicians and artists who were friends who were black who used to come over to my house, and that was pretty darn scary. Our driveway got bombed. We lived in Fordingbridge Farm out way in the country past Guilford. It's all now developed, but it was an original settled Quaker farm, and they bombed that driveway because they didn't like what we were doing. I never set out to be overtly political or an advocate. I can remember I had friends who are all dead now. I remember one of them painted his face and sat next to a statue by the library at Chapel Hill, with his face painted two different colors and he was naked, and nobody arrested him. He was protesting the war and stuff like that. So it was horrific on that level. On the other side, it was ethereal because of the musicianship, the visual art, cinematic arts, they were all knit together, and it was incredibly vibrant. And I was the least talented in the orbit that I was in. I was nobody, but I happened to be in a place where I saw the best poets there, the best visual

artists there, the best writers, the best women advocates. I mean, we had people who were in SNCC that were incredibly literate women. I would have never expected that, right? And I don't remember having divisions all during that time because of the art scene. There weren't. There was no difference. I'll probably get in trouble for saying this, but there was a lot of resonance between the West Village at the time, and I was up there a lot, a *lot*, mainly because of dramatic arts, and I was teaching music at the drama and music school in Winston-Salem, and now I can't remember the name of it because I'm old and forgetful. But because I was on a French horn and science scholarship at school, I was in all these symphonies traveling. The School of the Arts in Winston-Salem, that's where this is. And that was even crazier with artistic fervor. We had Kate Hepburn was in residence the second year I was teaching there. And I'm still going to college while this is going on, too, and my best friend is on a full-ride drama scholarship there, and he graduates, and Hepburn likes his work. He was in [inaudible 26:50], and she was obviously the lead, the matriarch, and he was the wayward son who could not figure out the difference between murdering someone on the field and murdering someone on the street once the war's over. What a character. I remember seeing it, watching him mature. And there is one place where she has to literally knock him down, and she was literally punching him in the face and knocking him over, and he came home with bruises all over. I said, "What the hell's going on?"

And he said, "Kate round hauled me." [laughs]

And I said, "Seriously? I want to come see that."

So he let me into the rehearsal and she did it again the next day. Finally, they had to take her aside and say, "You can't do that anymore because the performance is this

weekend. He's going to be bloody." [Laughter] He was so dedicated to his craft, he moved to the Village and he dug in, and it was like everybody you'd want to think of the era, I got to meet them all. They could give a happy crap who I was. I got to hang out with this guy. And they all became kind of quasi-famous, and then the people they were working with, Woody Allen was there, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera Dylan, they were all there. Lennon, Yoko, it was face-to-face. I got to sit there right with them. I'm going, "Wow, I can't even believe I'm here." They didn't know who I was, they didn't care, right? It's because my friends knew them. So I was very lucky.

[0:28:14.4]

Kate Medley: Sounds like quite a cultural heyday.

[0:28:16.9]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah, it was fun. It was fun.

[0:28:19.9]

Kate Medley: You'd been hearing about the South from your mother and her history here as a kid, and then you moved to the South. What were your impressions? What did you expect and then what did you find? Do you have much memory of that?

[0:28:39.7]

Glenn Roberts: I do, and there's three levels. On the spiritual level, I found it more intense, and being a person of constant quandary with regard to where spirit should be,

whatever that is, I found it really challenging because one of my earliest and best friends had grown up—he wasn't even allowed to dance. I didn't know there were people like that. You couldn't go to a dance, and it was accepted, and Dad was the preacher and it was a huge church and a lot of following. His dad was smart, his mom was a nice person and everything, but dancing wasn't allowed. I'm going, "What is this?" So there was that, which was really confusing.

And then the second level would be the art scene, which I was surprised to find out had more power than where I grew up, which was with really great musicians, pretty much, not so much novels, not so much visual artists, but performance artists, tons of them. And in that orbit, there was some of what I encountered in the South, but not a whole lot.

And then the third level, and I think the most important, was that I grew up in a Southern kitchen with the influences that flow directly out of Southern ideas and Southern quests for integrity. When you speak about the welcome table, my first idea is that there's forty dishes on that damn table and everything's from scratch, and everything, you knew who grew it if you didn't grow it yourself. And back in the day, you could actually go and get oats and do your own oats. You weren't buying Quaker where we were. And you had to go to the dairy, because no one's delivering milk. So we'd go down to Mission Valley to the dairy and get our own milk, because nobody's delivering it. So you'd actually go to where the cows were and get milk right out of the cow. I can remember my mom's looking at the top of the cream on the cauldron, going, "Oh, no, more cream," when they were actually scooping the bottles. That was kind of cool.

So they had the bottle plant over there for delivery into San Diego, and we were no longer in Hillcrest, so we couldn't get deliveries. We were out in the middle of nowhere in a place called Kearney Mesa. There was nothing out there but arroyos and wild animals and snakes. We were the first people in our housing development, the very first house, right? So we had to go to the dairy to get our stuff, and it was different.

So seeing my mom work from the ground like that, massive vegetable garden, terraced going down into the arroyo, my sister and I were tasked with hauling rocks to make the terraces to plant the citrus trees going down into the arroyo behind our house, and by year three and four, we were having, bearing everything, so it was like a little—I think she said, “Now this is more like what I like.” She was controlling everything. And we had honeys of all different colors. It sounds a little freaky, but she was really into that stuff, and she was into making vinegars, and she had canning going all the time. It was a 365-day-a-year proposition in her canning deal, and the canning include the stuff I now understand really well, or sort of. No one really understands this well.

But the five basic transformations that are foundations for anything, medicine and/or food, which show best in Southern food in general, vinegar ferment, alcohol ferment. We love booze. Nixtamalization. She was doing that with liming pickles and things like that. We don't think about it that way, but that's exactly the same thing as making tortillas, only with vegetables, etc., etc. All those basic transformations she was doing for provisioning, she couldn't help herself because she grew up doing it. So we canned stuff. We gave stuff away all the time. She was producing more stuff. And my sister and I were the [inaudible 32:47], dishwashers, everything. I don't think I've ever seen—I never saw my mom wash dishes.

But that, when I moved to the South, I was disappointed on the first blush because we never had good grits, and she said, “When you get to the South, you’re going to have good grits.” And the other thing she said is, “We never have good rice here, and you’re going to have great rice.” And occasionally she had a Pan Am pilot friend who would bring decent rice that was hand-harvested and hand-pounded, and they’d fly it out of Atlanta to San Diego. He was on that run. So we would get good grits every once in a while, but the rest of them were aged out and dead and forgettable, okay but forgettable, nothing to write home about.

And rice was a constant problem because we were Geechee and it was three meals a day with rice, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and then pets. I was the rice cook for the pets. That’s the one I go back to all the time, because that’s really where my talent fit in culinary-wise, why I can still work with a chef who could be like my mom, and I can come up with ideas that resonate and amplify through a great cooking talent. I just can’t do it myself. It’s constant consternation. And it wasn’t because my mother was so good; it was because I really don’t have that innate talent, even though I understand it up side one, down the other.

And what is most important when I moved to the South, speaking on a culinary level, it was always really important to me. The very first thing I found myself doing in the South was gravitating immediately to that large table on a Sunday afternoon. I don’t know why. I ended up finding it best in Native American communities, and this is before the Hispanic revolution happened in North Carolina, because this is all in the surrounds of Chapel Hill, Greensboro, High Point, Thomasville, and on and on and on, Snow Camp,

one of my favorite places in the whole universe for no reason whatsoever except the food was so great there.

But that Sunday table, even though I wasn't going to anybody's church, I ended up at the Quaker Sunday table for some damn reason, and it was just extraordinary. And all the relatives were there, and it's every bloody week, and they're not doing it to one-up anybody. "Just don't eat Aunt Harriet's sauerkraut. It sucks." Right? That was about the meanest thing you'd ever hear, and the rest of it was, "Check out the pies." Not pie; pies. "And check out—look, they made a grits casserole. Cool. Mmm." And, "Who made the sausage?" And they knew who made the sausage. And on and on and on.

And I've only experienced that one time in the last five years, probably, because I haven't had time to do it anymore. I used to do it even when I was still building hotels and stuff. I'd just go out in the country and find people and end up having food with them, because I've always gravitated. I don't know why I do that, but I always have. And in the case of getting to the rural table, it was the explosion of color and options. The idea of the horn of plenty actually manifests itself, and it's only Southern. I don't think—you see it other places, but it's not the same, to me.

[0:36:08.4]

Kate Medley: You graduated from Carolina.

[0:36:12.5]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah.

[0:36:14.2]

Kate Medley: And then spent some time in the Air Force, sailing private yachts, and driving long-haul trucks.

[0:36:22.2]

Glenn Roberts: Mm-hmm.

[0:36:23.5]

Kate Medley: What were you doing? What was that era?

[0:36:26.9]

Glenn Roberts: Well, sailing was learning how to fish without a tool [Laughter] and learning how to forage, because every time I made port, we'd go into the interior. That's what you do. So it was both long times at sea with no break because it's just 24/7/365 when you're on the water, and if you think it's something different, you're dead, on a small boat because the first that goes is the engine when you're outside the United States and you're not putting into port and you don't care anymore on a sailboat. And the second thing that goes is all your electronics, because you don't give a crap anymore. You'd doing sun sights and star shoots and moon sights and all that, and you're just doing dead-reckoning navigation, and it's perfectly adequate for continent to continent and even close-in navigation if you really know what you're doing.

So I spent the first half of the time I was sailing learning all those skills and the second half enjoying them. And you're there, you're hitting it, and everything's

abbreviated when you're under way, and then when you hit port, you get to do the things. It's kind of like the stupid thing about the sailors hitting port, only I always wanted to hit port to do cultural stuff. So I'd find myself in the middle of nowhere with the San Blas Indians and, like, listening to leopards scream in the background, stuff like that, in a tropical jungle when you walk six feet in and you can't see anything but you just hear noises. And I wanted to experience all that, so that's what I did. That's what I was doing when I was sailing, doing both, being on the water with those tremendous visuals and God knows what jumping out of the ocean, which everybody thinks it's boring, but, actually, if you're out there a while, you're not imagining the fact that some fish you've never seen before that's twelve-foot long just jumped over your boat, and you're going, "Wow! Where'd that come from?" Or a bird shows up in the middle of nowhere and just hangs out for three or four days. You just flip him something every couple of hours and, like this, like this, beside the boat, and you're going, "I wonder what that bird's thinking." It gets pretty basic. [Laughter] And the people—

[0:38:42.7]

Kate Medley: You were twenty-five?

[0:38:43.9]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-four, twenty-seven, yeah.

[0:38:49.9]

Kate Medley: How'd you end up in South Carolina?

[0:38:55.0]

Glenn Roberts: Well, gosh, that's tough.

[0:38:59.3]

Kate Medley: I know that I skipped over a number of years. So if there's anything you want to tell—

[0:39:01.9]

Glenn Roberts: That's all right. That's all right. Charles Duell, he was friends with Reggie Hanes and Catherine Schopfer, who was—

[0:39:20.5]

Kate Medley: Is Reggie the architect?

[0:39:22.3]

Glenn Roberts: Reggie Hanes, Hanes underwear, Hanes fortune, the Hanes family, Philip Hanes, chairman of everything on a charitable basis there is. Philip was the main heir that anybody from my generation will remember because, essentially, he sat on the Smithsonian board, he sat on the Met board, he sat on every board there was. He helped found Graylyn. The Graylyn Estate in Winston-Salem was pivotal in moving RJR World Headquarters up into the new age with the first—people don't know this, but RJR at the time was centered, world headquarters, in Winston-Salem, and they had a mini Empire

State Building there. It was the first buildout that looks exactly like the Empire State Building. It's the center of town. So they had all that architectural heritage through the Reynolds fortune and the various Reynolds family, and the Hanes, the Cone Mills people, and the Reynolds all were under this resonant power structure that had massive amounts of arts behind it. So when you put them together, it starts becoming something really formidable. Reggie was the polo-playing—Reggie, if you're still alive, sorry—was the polo-playing kind of not ne'er-do-well, but wasn't nearly as serious as Philip. Philip was dedicated to the humanity, the higher arts, and all that stuff. They were fabulously wealthy, so they really didn't have to go to work. And I knew Reggie because of—I didn't play polo, but Reggie was really into wine and I was too. And Catherine, my current partner at Anson Mills, was friends with the Hanes family because she grew up in Winston and she was sort of in the same orbit, but she was also in hospitality, where she's affable, and that was important to him. I can remember Reggie maybe even having Catherine tell me, or Reggie came to me directly and said, "I've got a friend, Charles, that I play polo with, and he wants to do whatever." And Catherine and I by that time were building hotels and restaurants as a company called Restaurant Design and Management, and I'm going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I hear this all the time." I didn't know. "But, sure, Reggie, whatever." Then some guy shows up in one of our properties and just comes out of the blue and says, "Hi, my name's Eric Brooks, and I represent Charles Duell and a few other people," and he named them and sounded like somebody could write a check. And then I figured out he was talking about *the* Charles Duell. I'm going, "Are you talking about Charles Duell, Middleton Charles Duell?"

And he said, "Yeah."

I said, “You’re working with Charles Duell?” Because Charles had worked with the Rockefellers, and I’d done a property for the Rockefellers. So I said, “Are you talking about the Charles Duell that did Rock Resorts with Laurence and David?”

And they said, “Yes.”

And I said, “I’ll do it for free,” because everything they did is killer. I mean, architecture to the nth power. They really get it. I mean, they’re good.

[0:42:37.0]

Kate Medley: How do you spell the last name, Duell?

[0:42:39.7]

Glenn Roberts: D-u-e-l-l. He’s the tenth heir to the Middleton whatever fortune, but he happens to have been very talented with regard to historic restoration, which is what Catherine and I were doing. We worked only in older properties. It was what’s now Charleston Place in Charleston and what was then something they had titled Planters Inn, which was a concept that was totally stalled because it was such a complicated buildout, there was no right angles in this old building. They’d taken it on. Architectural firm was world-renowned, really good architects, and Charles was a partner and he was furious because they were behind schedule, way over budget, and he was looking at it, and he knows architecture really well, because he’s done tons of properties worldwide, and he’s looking at it, going, “I know this isn’t going right.” He’s got a friend that’s on the ground there, this Eric Brooks, and he’s saying, “Eric, you need to get somebody in here that understands hospitality and the way a hospitality business is supposed to be constructed.

This is not going well, and this is a large investment. I don't particularly care if we lose our butt, but I do care that we're in the center of Charleston and this is a historic property, and I don't want to screw it up. It's got to be right."

[0:44:04.8]

Kate Medley: Where were you and Catherine working prior to that?

[0:44:06.6]

Glenn Roberts: We were working in DC all the way around to New Orleans and out in LA, believe it or not, for Larry Hagerman, doing a diner in L. I don't know how I got into that. Hagerman bought a diner in New Jersey and wanted to box it all up, take it to LA, and slam it down, and he'd hired us to do a concept proposal on it. We never actually did the diner, but I think he ended up getting it and doing it, and it became pretty good landmark out there. It was a nice piece. It was a Monell diner, just totally intact in New Jersey, and he took it down piece by piece and shipped it all to LA and put it back together again.

[0:44:40.9]

Kate Medley: So you moved to Charleston in what year?

[0:44:44.0]

Glenn Roberts: Jesus. 1982? Something like that.

[0:44:51.8]

Kate Medley: Tell us what you encountered.

[0:44:56.3]

Glenn Roberts: [19]81. Catherine and I were doing restaurant design and management, and she had gotten married and was perfectly happy doing what she was doing. I think she'd been a wine broker and all that, and then she heard that we were going to do this project and she asked if she could help. She helped design all the bar service and stuff. And then her husband came down to work with us, and I think she decided to stay and work. And somehow I got sucked into helping with the restaurant at Planters Inn. I have no idea. We had a rule we were not going to operate restaurants in the stuff that we did in these hotels. We would never get involved in management. We would help find a chef, help find managers, stuff like that, but we wouldn't get involved. And somehow, stupidly, I started getting involved. It was the wine program, because we'd done lots of really good wine programs. We worked with everybody that was good. And I said, "Well, that's going to be easy."

And the next thing they're saying, "Well, you want to talk to the chef?"

And I'm going, "Well, why would I want to talk to the chef? I'm doing the wine program."

"Well, you know, he's thinking about concepts, this and that. You want to sign off on the food."

I said, "I'm not a chef. I'm not going to sign off on the food."

"No, no, just talk to the chef."

And the next thing I know, I'm the de facto person driving a concept on the ground for real, and I'm going, "How the hell did I get involved in this?" And then hit the wall at the speed of light, and I'm penniless. I invested everything I had in that project. On the street a block away from where the Planters Inn is now, totally penniless from being a pretty wealthy, successful guy. I'm going, "What am I going to do? Oh, God."

I just remember one of my friends walked by, her name's Anna Hagood, and I'm sitting in a very expensive business suit with very expensive shoes on, on the ground, by the bank, a block from my property. And she said, "What the hell are you doing? Are you okay? Are you sick?"

I said, "No, I'm broke, but I'm not sick."

She said, "What's wrong?"

I said, "Well, everything in that property just blew up right in my face."

She said, "Seriously?"

[0:47:18.9]

Kate Medley: When was that?

[0:47:19.5]

Glenn Roberts: That was about 19—okay. This whole thing was between the end of 1979 and 1982- [19]83, in there, and I forget which. I was only on this project for a year, and in that year we did twelve property concepts and built out four. Every one hit the wall. They were all happening at the same time. The Wilcox House, which is one of the

reasons why I got in, that's in Aiken where my mother grew up, and she had dined there and seen Winston Churchill there, right, when she went back to visit, because Winston Churchill used to hang at the Wilcox, big equestrian place over there. And Wilcox is gorgeous. It's still there. It's a great property. I went to work for everybody after Charles Duell was involved because of the Wilcox House because he was involved there, too, and he was interested in the Churchill legacy and maintaining the architectural integrity of that place too. And I'm going, "Oh, man, this is like going to heaven."

[0:48:15.0]

Kate Medley: How'd you dig out?

[0:48:17.8]

Glenn Roberts: Became a shrimper. [Laughter]

[0:48:24.4]

Kate Medley: The path to great fortune.

[0:48:27.2]

Glenn Roberts: Started sailing, but not for money. I was done for life sailing for money. I'd been paid on every sailing gig I'd had worldwide, and I was just over it. So I started sailing for recreation and ended up giving sailing lessons, which was odd, because I'd never done that before. And then I got a job as a shrimp boat striker and giving sailing lessons at the same time. That was interesting, because I'd shrimp four days a

week and then give sailing lessons three days a week, and that was kind of fun. I was living on Sullivan's Island in an old rattletrap beach house, which was great. That was in Charleston. There was no one there. In the wintertime, you could drive up and down the streets the wrong way, and it wouldn't make any difference because no one was on the streets, right? It's hard to believe that Charleston was ever like that. So that was the best time I had in Charleston.

So, sailed a lot, striker on a shrimp boat, got the name "College Boy." Junior Magwood, I didn't know it at the time when I went to work for him, that he was the most famous shrimper in the history of shrimping in South Carolina. But it was also the hardest work I'd ever done, and that was intriguing, because it starts at 2:00 a.m. and he'd be yelling nonstop until 5:00 p.m. in the afternoon. When he knew we had some kind of catch and we were heading back in, he still would work your butt off. So it never broke, never stopped. He was the only captain out there that wouldn't take a break, and he was notorious, and he had trouble keeping a crew. I stuck with him for a long time because I was just fascinated. He was married to three women. They didn't know each other. That was horrible. But it was also intriguing because the food on the boat had three different culinary inputs. I don't think he cooked, but he kept calling me "College Boy" and he made me cook. That was the worst thing you could do to a person who's striking, is to make them cook, because that is the lowest job on the boat, normally.

But you'd get these setups from his wives, and they were extraordinary, just stuff I'd never seen before, simple stuff, you know, like a bean casserole or something like that, but just amazing food, and yard eggs, really good stuff. And that became, inadvertently because I was College Boy, the lowest-producing shrimper on the staff,

“Get him out of there. Let somebody that can actually pick shrimp get on that and get it done so we can have some breakfast,” kind of thing. “College Boy, go cook breakfast.”

“College Boy, go cook the lunch.” “College Boy, make us a snack.” Right?

[0:51:21.3]

Kate Medley: Do people still call you that?

[0:51:22.2]

Glenn Roberts: College Boy?

[0:51:23.0]

Kate Medley: Mm-hmm.

[0:51:23.7]

Glenn Roberts: No. In fact, Wayne Magwood is all grown up and everything. He was a kid when I was doing that, and he’s never called me College Boy. I see him. I don’t even know if he knows what I look like anymore, but he’s never—only Junior Magwood would call me College Boy. The guys on the boat didn’t. They’d come to work drunk with a 30.06 and go out and shoot seagulls and shit like that. I mean, it was crazy.

But the seafaring part of it, I was the only guy that would show up consistently because I didn’t drink that much, and I would go out in any weather, and I was the only person on the docks that would do that besides George Albers, who had the next fleet of boats down from us. And Junior would go out. If anybody would show up to go, he

would go out. His sons wouldn't even go. I'd look out, and if I saw something coming over the jetties, I'd go over. That day before, if I knew it was coming, I'd actually go to the dock before Junior got there. I'd be sitting there waiting for him. He'd say, "What you doing out here?"

I said, "Hey, it's storming. Let's go."

And he'd say, "Okay, I'll go if you go." Right? And you go out and it'd beat the crap out of the boat, but he didn't seem to care. We'd unshipped the rudder twice. Those rudders weigh like four tons apiece, and it takes eight hours to get them back in place. Going like this up and down the swells, it'll throw the rudder off of a big boat like that.

[0:52:49.6]

Kate Medley: And you'd go out because you needed the money or because you—

[0:52:51.8]

Glenn Roberts: No, I went out because I liked the storming. I've always liked that. I sailed around the world, so I love weather, right? I never saw anything—he wouldn't go out in a hurricane, and I wouldn't ask him to, but we'd go out in full gales and stuff like that on purpose. And we'd try to shift the bags. We'd put the boards out and actually try to pull in that. He considered that to be part of being what he was. I mean, to be able to fish in any weather, he was the only person who'd do it, and, damn it, he was going to do it. He's an amazing man, just *incredible* man, right?

[0:53:27.6]

Kate Medley: Work you way up to Anson Mills.

[0:53:32.7]

Glenn Roberts: It's really easy. I was having the time of my life, and then I got the deal I couldn't refuse. Mike Bennett at Perdita's had heard somewhat about me. One of my friends, Danny Haas, who owns Vineyard Brands now—it's a fairly well-respected wine company—had called me from DC and said, "I've got a really old client that's kind of a nostalgia thing for my dad. My dad—" They lived on Kiawah. They had a resort home on Kiawah way back, Robert, his dad, before he passed. And Danny was a chum from other places. And he called and he said, "We've always had a great relationship with the Bennett family of Charleston."

I said, "The Bennetts? You mean, the rice Bennetts?"

He said, "No, no, same name but not the same family." Because the rice Bennetts were the ones that won, and the other people had to go to Texas, which is why there's rice in Texas now, right? The Bennetts are ground zero for rice heritage in Charleston, and they were ground zero for art and other things, too, at the time.

So I said, "Oh, not that Bennett?"

He said, "No, it's Gordon Bennett."

I said, "Oh, I've heard of Gordon Bennett. He was the guy at the Yacht Club. Isn't—wait. That's Perdita's. You're kidding me, right?"

He said, "Yeah, it's Perdita's. So you know him?"

I said, "Well, he's dead, Danny."

He said, "No, no, you know his son Mike."

I said, “No. I wouldn’t go to Perdita’s.”

And Danny said, “Why not?”

I said, “Because the kitchen’s tired, and I’m not into that.” I said, “Their wines are extraordinary, but they don’t really welcome you if you’re not going to have food there.” Because they’d stopped purchasing wine in the [19]60s, they had so much, and they’re perfectly cellared, really amazing, I mean, all big bottles, salmanazars, and stuff like that, just incredible wine cellar, and that was world-famous. They were world-famous for it in the [19]60s, and so I knew about the—they had madeira in there to die for, which I love. So Danny said, “Well, would you just go talk to Mike Bennett? He’s maybe needing some help.” So I went over there, and I go in the back door because the front door’s locked, and it’s an entire kitchen of black cooks, an entire kitchen. I’d never seen in Charleston an entire kitchen of black cooks, except in the black diners and the breakfast joints. I’d never seen a gourmet restaurant—because I’d never been in a kitchen, I don’t know why—black cooks. They’d all been there forever. Miss Alma had been there since 1952, and she was the pantry person. And Sadie had been there for most of her career. She was the last of the catering types that David Shields has written about in Charleston. Everybody there was related to that ethos that happened after slavery in the Nat Fuller dinners and all that stuff that David’s codiciled so well, and actually set back in motion somewhat. David Shield has been amazing on this level. But that suspended animation of proud black people who actually know what they’re doing, that don’t take anything from anybody, that was still operating in that kitchen, and I walked in and went, “Wow!” And then there was Barry Waldrop, a white guy, in that kitchen. I’m going, “What the hell?” And I looked at him, I said, “What are *you* doing here?” He was

the only white guy employed in the restaurant except for his best friend, Mitchell Crosby, who's world-famous in Charleston. Now, he *is* Charleston now. Mitchell's family was a seafaring family, and I knew the Crosbys from my shrimping stuff. I looked at Mitchell, I went, "I know all your uncles and your dads and your moms and your aunts and stuff. How come I've never met you?"

And Mitchell said, "Well, how do you know us?"

And I said, "Because I struck with Magwood."

And Mitchell looked at Barry and told Barry, "Hey, hire that guy." Right?

I'm going, "Wait a second. I came over to talk to Mike Bennett. I'm not applying for a job."

And Mitchell just looked at Barry again, said, "Hire him. Hire that guy. If he knows shrimping, he can help."

I don't know what they were talking about. I talked to Mike Bennett, and Mike's a really intriguing kind of polymath. We're talking about the Stock Exchange and then we talk about what's going on in French politics and what's going on in Africa, and then, "I heard something about this stuff in Singapore," and you're going, "Well, I didn't."

"But, Mike, I'm over here. Why am I here?"

And he says, "Well, Barry needs help in the kitchen."

I said, "You know, I quit the restaurant business, Mike. If you didn't know, I'm giving sailing lessons and I'm shrimping occasionally, and that's about it."

And he said, "No, no, you need to think about this. This restaurant's been here since about 1952. I've got our wine cellar and I have all of my dad's culinary archives, going all the way back to the Yacht Club."

And I said, “Uh-oh,” because this is where the Jewish community was factoring to the Yacht Club but they could never go have dinner. And I’m going, “You’ve got culinary archives from the Yacht Club. Seriously?”

He said, “Yes. My father, when he quit the Yacht Club, took them with him.” And I don’t know that anybody really knows that, and I don’t have the copies, just in case anybody’s looking. Mike Bennett might have them. Katie’s passed on, his mom. And I didn’t actually succumb until Katie promised to pay me in those big bottles of wine, right?

[0:59:23.5]

Kate Medley: This is mid-[19]90s?

[0:59:24.8]

Glenn Roberts: Probably. Probably a little bit before then. Probably right after 1990, but I’m not sure. Yeah. But I shouldn’t have done it, in retrospect. I’m glad I did, but I shouldn’t have.

[0:59:38.9]

Kate Medley: What was your job?

[0:59:39.6]

Glenn Roberts: My job? I was *useless*. I’m a rotten cook, so immediately went over to work with Alma in the pantry. She didn’t even think I was fast enough, and Alma was

slow. She's terrific, but she was slow. She made family meal, and that's where I really started digging in, because that was the kind of food I was raised on. That's the kind of food my mom cooked. So had anybody ever had the stroke of genius to make family meal the restaurant concept there, it would be world-famous to this minute. It was already a world-famous venue because of everything they were doing, because they were vertically integrated on many concepts. The quality wasn't that good, but the concepts were really powerful. It was all local, every bit of it, top to bottom, and it was all really well rooted and documented foodways, and it was cooked by the people that had developed the food. Man, it was good, you know, when *they* did it, but when they were cooking it for the people that were sitting out front, there wasn't any soul left. And that's why I don't know why they wanted to talk to me, I don't know, because I suck, right?

And then I noticed that Barry was really, really good, and he ended up going to culinary school at UBoston. He's really good. He still probably knows more about this cooking than anybody else alive in Charleston now. He's the secret weapon that no one ever bothers to talk to. Mitchell Crosby and Barry Waldrop are the two people that carry that on in the white community, and neither one of those guys would tell you they're white. They were raised by black people and they like hanging with black people. And this stuff is just amazing, and somebody needs to do an entire top to bottom—I've told John T. Edge this many times. Somebody needs to get Mitch Crosby and Barry Waldrop in the same room with all the people that are still alive that they worked with in that era, and they would have this wrapped. No one's done it. It's formidable, but it's not impossible. It would be *amazing* 'cause the food is *so* good. It's off the islands and it's all inspired by the islands, and it's all rice cookery and it's just amazing food.

[1:01:52.5]

Kate Medley: What are they doing now?

[1:01:54.0]

Glenn Roberts: Barry just does what he wants. Mitch is the number—if you want to be “in” in Charleston society, if you don’t know Mitch, you’re not. So Mitchell Crosby has his own destination stuff. One of his smaller clients is Boeing International. I mean, he can command a 200-seat jet for a private flight without even questioning it, and he’s equally comfortable in an oyster roast with a bunch of poor people who can barely afford to be there and/or multibillionaires. I mean, he’s an amazing person. When I met him, he was still a kid. Barry learned everything he knows about food from his nannies and from Sadie Robinson, who was the number one cook there, who was the last of the vestiges of the intact catering culture of Charleston, which was number one culinary concentration of stuff that led to Jules Harder studying there, who founded the Fairmont out there and did—oh, crap, what’s the name of the world-famous restaurant in New York? He was the chef in New York. I can’t think of it right now.

But anyhow, if you look hard at all of the culinary developments that happen, they all go to the center of Charleston, and I get beat up for saying this all the time, but even Jules Harder and—he wrote *A Physiology of Taste* in six volumes, and there’s only two volumes left that we know of, maybe three. But he wrote an entire set, and he did it based upon his work on the Sea Islands and understanding how food was produced here, and he took it out to California and created California cuisine from it, and Alice Waters

and everybody else has been drawing from that legacy from the time he put it together. It's Native American; it's African; it's French; it's Spanish; it's all the Creole things we think about in the right order with the right influences. And the people at Perdita's all cooked in that tradition, and Barry and Mitch learned it. They've got it in their bones. I suck. I only know it academically and what I read and what I tasted, but they actually can produce it. So if you went to an oyster roast that Barry does or that Mitch does, it's going to be totally different than anybody else's oyster roast in this generation because they lost it. There's a whole generation of Charleston people that don't have that black input anymore. That heritage is not being passed down. It's the largest loss. I think Jessica Harris has put it best. It's the biggest drain happening. And when Nathalie Dupree moved from Atlanta to Charleston, the first thing she said is, "What happened to the women? Where are they?" She was, like, distraught because that *is* the engine in Atlanta. It's still out there in the country. It's hard to find in Charleston anymore.

[1:04:47.6]

Kate Medley: Interesting.

[1:04:49.4]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah.

[1:04:51.7]

Kate Medley: So you're moving toward the beginning of Anson Mills.

[1:04:55.2]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah. So, Perdita's. Then I find myself back in the saddle in the food business, doing development. I end up thinking about concept properties, end up doing a bunch of work in Savannah, set the rules that I'm never going to work outside the Natchez Trail [Laughter] in Charleston and Savannah anymore, some kind of weird idiosyncratic or xenophobic notion I had that I just wasn't going to get on airplanes anymore. I worked in high discipline on architecture and development projects, a lot of them, then ended up in South Beach doing stuff, worked with the Balish family, Bill the senior, being a cohort, wasn't a partner, wasn't even in business, just had a running dialogue for eleven years with Bill Balish, who was a person who would go get his own fiddlehead ferns if he felt like it or, you know, buy a new airplane. To him, it was all the same stuff. I was interested in how he thought, how his wife and daughters and son thought. It was an interesting family because they had been so well educated overseas and here, and Bill had grown up working in a boiler factory. I mean, he was like a Yankee redneck and had driven himself all the way to the point where he'd become incredibly informed on architecture, and I think that's where we all met, because they loved architecture and I did, too, because I'd been doing it for so long.

So we had a bunch of projects together, and one of the last ones I was involved with was the conceptualization of Anson Restaurant. Everybody thinks that I worked for Anson Restaurant, but it's another one of those things where I liked the original idea so much, I ended up being a busboy in there, but I never really worked in the restaurant. But Bill's son built it from scratch, and that was interesting because he had no experience, and he was in there with a sledgehammer and a saw and everything else, and

I watched a kid—and I happened to admire Jeff Balish a lot. I watched that kid go from not doing a whole lot to being incredible, right? And he put the entire concept together himself structurally and still managed to maintain the historic integrity of the building without blowing it up. And with the symbiotic help of his family, were very sensitive for architectural spaces and light and things like that, the stuff they ended up putting together was amazing, and in doing that, they had the notion of a food concept that I thought might have some legs, and it turned out to have some real legs. They decided to do a restaurant based honestly instead of on destination, like cheesy Charleston destination stuff, which involves everything we know about, Huguenot tour, things like that, that have been beat to death. They decided to do classics out of the canons, actually looking at historic foodways. John Martin Taylor had a shop right across the street. When John Martin's Cookbook Shop was there, it was nominated by *The New York Times* as being the best culinary bookstore in America, but for good reason. John was an amazing researcher, had done *Hoppin' John's Low Country Cuisine*, which is still a bible for everyone. I mean, it's one of the best cookbooks, I think, ever written, let alone about the South. And John Martin Taylor was generous and other people in that same orbit were as well. I could name hundreds of them, of people that we all admire and respect, that just would give and give and give of their time. I was looking at this place that Jeff was working on. It became Anson Restaurant, and I, frankly, don't even know what they're doing there now, but it's still operating. That's amazing. It's been around for a long time, so they created classics that stick, and they were doing that. That was pretty intriguing. Then somebody made the mistake of telling me that they had a chance for me to buy The Pink House in Savannah, and I'd already been down there working on a few

projects anyhow. I did the Royal Colony right next door to it and used to sit there and drool at the building. I mean, it was derelict when I first saw it, really sort of dangerous architecturally because some of the supporting foundation was coming apart, but it was the perfect Georgian, and Georgian isn't anybody's favorite architecture except for me. Everybody thinks Federal when they think Savannah or later. But it was a Georgian and it was a perfect Georgian, and the history behind it was kind of shadowy, and I sort of liked that and kept trying to figure out who the hell William Mills Habersham was and even how to pronounce his name. And then I ended up at Owens-Thomas House looking at the first over-under French cooking range in America, going, "Wait a second. Where the hell am I? This is like the foundation of modern cooking for Americas. Why don't I know this already? I've been doing this for a long time." And so out of the Anson Restaurant thing and the idea of looking at the classics instead of tarting them up and modernizing them, actually looking at them for what they really are and trying to figure out what the ingredients were, that's where the first idea came from. The second idea was how to reflect, and what I'd always worked in, which was adaptive reuse in historic architecture for a long time; by then it would have been a half century, was looking at the Pink House, going how do you do this and you don't screw it up. I ended up taking some shortcuts I shouldn't have, and I felt bad later about it and changed things up and eventually got where I thought the place should be. And then the Balishes took it over, but I decided not to buy it myself because it was offered to me as an owner-financed gig, and I could have gotten into it for nothing, and I sort of wish I did sometimes. But the whole thing, I lived in the building for a year-plus while we did all the restoration work to make it safe to even be in there, and also got to regulate how intelligently or not

intelligently we were doing it, and I was left fairly much on my own, except I had to bring in Bill Balish. I had not a penny in equity in it. I wasn't being paid specially to do it; I was just doing it. I had to bring him in a couple of times to bail me out because I got in over my head. But the idea of putting together, looking through all the historic menus is where Anson Mills came from, and in that particular place, because William Mills Habersham was a rice factor, that's when I got on John T. Edge's radar, because we did something for the Smithsonian that he consulted to, and we blew up the original menu proposal. That's when I got my first spanking from John T. Edge through the board of the Smithsonian, because it was for the board of the Smithsonian. They were riding in a train from, I think, Memphis all the way to Savannah, going to dead-end in Savannah, and they were going to have culinary experiences on the stops on the way here, on the way to Savannah. And I was supposed to do the last one at The Olde Pink House, and that's how Anson Mills was born, because that menu I submitted saying, "Do you have any idea what Savannah red rice is?" was the way the letter started, and it was on Smithsonian letterhead. I don't even know who wrote it. Now it's Chris Wilson up there, and Chris would send me a letter just like this today. So it would be the same letter, but at least I'd know who's sending it. And I'm going, "I don't have time for this." And then I read the second paragraph. "Do you even know what red rice is?" I'm going, "I'm in Savannah. Why is somebody trying to tell me about red rice from Washington, DC?"

They said, "Red rice is more than putting ketchup on rice," because I had to send recipes, and ketchup, mushrooms, you know, just the way we did red rice in Charleston

and Savannah, you know? And they said, “You have not done any reading whatsoever. Signed, blah. Please do. P.S. Please do.”

And I’m going, “Holy crap!” I look back at it, I still don’t know who it was, and I go, “Okay.” So I went over to the Habersham archives and went to the Savannah Historical Society and started looking for Savannah red rice, and that’s how Anson Mills started, really, trying to find out what Carolina gold rice was.

[1:14:18.9]

Kate Medley: Well, that was my next question.

[1:14:20.0]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah. And I found out that there was such a thing as Carolina gold rice. Then I found out, stupidly, that it was being grown right across the river by Dick Schulze, who’s now on the board of our foundation, and his son is a very, very good friend of mine and a wonderful man. And I farm rice on the same place that they had rice back then. So I put it in on purpose to honor the whole tradition of it, but that led to me looking at red rice and going, “Savannah red rice, oh, it’s African. Oh, it’s supposed to be made with African red rice. It’s not white rice with ketchup on it. That’s what honkies did to it. It was African red rice. It was Jollof rice, only it was our version of it. Oh, God, how could I have missed this?” Because I love food. I’m going, “Oh, Jesus Christ.” So I went to everybody I knew, which was John T. Edge, and asked him, said, “Where should I start with this?”

He said, “Well, you need to look at the history of rice and start with the strongest concept.”

And I said, “Okay, whatever the hell that means.” So I went back and looked, and it kept coming up Carolina Gold rice. So I said, “Okay, well, I’ll just do Carolina Gold rice. They’re growing it across the river. That’s easy. I can do that.” Yeah. [Laughter] So I’ll grow a bunch of corn, make grits, sell the grits to all my chef friends, and then I’ll take that money and start doing rice. And none of it worked out that way, but that was how Anson Mills started.

[1:15:56.8]

Kate Medley: That was the original concept.

[1:15:57.8]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah. It involved burning some clothes and getting rid of a couple of cars and all my household goods, and we had a big celebration. It turned out to be a big celebration on Folly Island, where I was living. I’ve chosen for the rest of my life to actually have my spirit reside in Folly Beach, even though it makes no sense at all. I don’t know why, but I particularly like it there, and even though I don’t really live anywhere except on an airplane anymore, again, which is what I was railing against when I first moved to Charleston because I was living in an airplane then, too, but for different reasons now. I’m not going to jobs; I’m going to see my darling wife, Kay, who’s a Yankee who won’t live in the South, so far. I haven’t given up on that. We talk about it, and I get her to come visit, right? So having said that, Anson Mills was born in the ire of

ignorance, because no matter what I looked or read, it would have been book farmin', and book farmin' don't work, right? And when I found out how much work it was, in retrospect, I wouldn't have ever done it to begin with, and if I had to do it over again now, I wouldn't do it this way, right? I'm glad we're where we are, but this was the weirdest way to get here.

[1:17:17.3]

Kate Medley: What would you do differently?

[1:17:18.4]

Glenn Roberts: One, I couldn't get here. You couldn't get here now. You hear that a lot from people who are old, right? I'm twenty years in now. The whole idea of Anson Mills started really coming together, started before 1995. It really started to come together in 1998. I was actually making food. And the difference between talking about things, knowing things, having a postdoc in historic research and contributing to things that inspire others to grow food and to feed people is that no matter how good your research integrity, you're going to be wrong when you get in the field, believe it or not. That's the big one. And if I had have known what I know now, I couldn't get here, because I got here by mistakes. I didn't get here by success. I got here by abject failure over and over and over again, because if I were smarter, I wouldn't have failed, and then I wouldn't have learned anything. I would have done something else. And if I were stupider, I couldn't have figured out why I failed. [Laughter] So it's a sandwich of

stupidity and tractors, right, to get here, and it really confounds providence that it's even working, to tell you the truth.

[1:18:36.5]

Kate Medley: And what is it now?

[1:18:37.6]

Glenn Roberts: It's an international research biosecurity entity that no one knows about but me. Does that sound spooky and stupid?

[1:18:57.6]

Kate Medley: Halloween.

[1:18:59.5]

Glenn Roberts: Okay, it's Halloween. Perfect. You're right. Okay? So, happy Halloween. I've had a decade of writing under-the-horizon whitepapers for people I've never met in foreign countries, that actually have impact on soft-power initiatives from everyone's government, a whole decade of never be published. No one knows about this. No one knows that we work diligently for biosecurity in lots of places in the world. We don't tell anybody. I can now because Trump's gutted the budget. The State Department, all my soft-power friends are gone, they're not there anymore, so I don't have to write whitepapers in 2018. And I can say this out loud, I'm meeting Ronit Vered from Tel Aviv Sunday night at Houseman in SoHo, and we're going to talk about Druze culture,

and I'll be able to actually write about our discussion because I won't have the overview of somebody looking over my shoulder from the government going, "No, we've got to take that black. That's a biosecurity problem." Right? Or I won't be working in Cuba through three or four different people, hoping the Ministry of Ag doesn't arrest them, talking about trying to find Carolina gold seed stock down there, which I know is in the country somewhere, etcetera, etcetera. Hello, Africa. Let's not even talk about that. It's been a really exciting deal. So Anson Mills today the people know is sending stuff all over the place, and, again, we don't articulate well. It's not by design. We have Kay, which is a formidable talent, and we have 300-plus recipes on the website and more than 1,400 pages of documentation last time I counted, and it doesn't even cover what we do, which means that Kay's brilliant and the rest of us are running to catch up. Catherine manages, translates all the crap to chefs worldwide, and she does a really good job of it. That's Catherine Schopfer. She's a de facto partner in Anson Mills and always has been. We've been in business, in businesses, together for thirty-five years. It's amazing that we haven't killed each other, right?

[1:21:14.1]

Kate Medley: Introduce us to Kay. Who is she and how'd you meet?

[1:21:18.2]

Glenn Roberts: Kay got an assignment from *The New York Times*, and who she got the assignment from, I don't know whether she pitched it or actually Ruth Reichl or "Doc" Willoughby knew Kay's boss boss at the time. Kay wasn't a staffer, she was only

pitching, but she was a regular, and she was a sought-after regular. They threw so much stuff at her, she couldn't do it all, and so they were sending her on international assignment and paying her out the wazoo to do it. She wanted to be that kind of food journalist. She was right on the cusp of going after Ruth Reichl's job at one point. She got recruited to actually take a hard look at it and decided she didn't want to do it, and they decided they didn't want her to do it, too, so it was kind of mutual. So, an amazing food talent person who studied pastry with Lenôtre, lived in Germany for five years and practiced pastry arts and chef arts there, had owned her own successful restaurant in Vermont, had studied with Madeleine Kammen deeply, had worked with everybody you know and love from the 1970s, [19]80s, and [19]90s forward, intimately, including Kincaid, Chris Schlesinger, Lydia Shire on. You just name them, she worked with every one of them, and she wrote. She ghosted cookbooks for Jasper White and a bunch of other people we don't even know about, because she refused to put her byline on the books, but she was the number one hit person for getting a cookbook together if Doe Coover was your agent, and Doe is still famous as an agent. You've got David Black, Doe Coover, and about three other people in that genre, and you're pretty much done with that kind of power. So just to be a redneck looking in on that world has been amazing. So, Kay, on a professional level, is totally uncompromising, and when I first met her, I just thought, "Well, she's on assignment from *The New York Times*. Whatever." I didn't know. And she brought with her a man named Danny, who I thought was her boyfriend, by the way, which was stupid.

[1:23:32.1]

Kate Medley: She came down here to do an article about you.

[1:23:35.8]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah. She got an assignment. She didn't pitch it. I think she got the assignment, and then she wasn't going to do it, and then she thought about it and she called me up. She hung up, and she said, "The first thing I thought was that guy's an asshole." Right? Because she called me, I was in the middle of milling, I said, "I've got to go, because we have deadlines. We're fresh milling. I've got to go." I'd pick up the phone every once in a while and answer it when it rang, and it was Kay Rentschler. I didn't know who she was, because I don't read that much. Sorry, John. But she said she wanted to do the piece and, frankly, it wasn't a nuisance, but I didn't have enough time to actually dig in and do the piece justice for her. So I sent her to Emile DeFelice, who was a colleague at the time and was growing stuff with me and had his own farm, and I sent her to see Aziz Mustafa, who I still think is one of the unsung talents in the Southern genre because he's Muslim and he was intact with all of his own seed from three centuries of his family being here. And he had a friend who had been a back radical during the worst time and had served time because of it. Kay went out there with Danny, and Danny said, "If the other guy even puts his hand near a gun, I'm outta here." I can remember him saying that. That guy had to be arrested because he was a little too radical still. But Aziz, amazing, just could grow anything and was growing anything, and his son's a great grower. So I sent her to see all these people, sent her to the middle of nowhere to see Syke's Barbecue down in St. Matthew's and God knows what out there, and another one up near Blythewood and one over near Chapin. I sent her to all these

little places because I thought she was into food and she'd like that. She kept coming back, she said, "Would you quit sending me places? I came down to do the article on you."

I said, "Well, I only have so much time."

She said, "Tough shit. Figure it out."

And so we started talking, and it was totally professional. And she did the piece, and I thought she nailed it pretty well, and so did John T. John T. called me up, and he said, "I'm surprised. That's damn good."

And I said, "Yeah, I can't believe she did it." I thought that's the last I'd ever hear from her, and then she sent me cookies, and it was all over, right? Just cheesy.

[1:25:55.5]

Kate Medley: What kind?

[1:25:56.5]

Glenn Roberts: Chocolate chip, oatmeal raisin, spice cookies, and shortbread cookies, four different kinds.

[1:26:05.8]

Kate Medley: I wouldn't have pegged you as a cookie man.

[1:26:07.6]

Glenn Roberts: I'm not particularly, but I was just astounded somebody like that would send me cookies, because I had no idea that you'd get cookies from someone like that. I like any kind of food, by the way. But I called her to thank her about the cookies and then we ended up getting married, but we only got married because I wanted to. She didn't want to.

[1:26:28.1]

Kate Medley: When did you get married?

[1:26:29.0]

Glenn Roberts: Took two years to actually get her to say she would, so it was 19—this is anniversary number twelve, so it was 2005, this time of year.

[1:26:41.1]

Kate Medley: A two-part question. Why is Anson Mills located in Columbia? And describe for those who don't have the treat to visit, what this place looks like.

[1:26:58.5]

Glenn Roberts: Okay. Anson Mills is located in Columbia for biosecurity. I didn't know that that was the only thing you do if you want to feed people for a living, and it's boring and it's kind of militaristic or maybe a little bit policy-wonkish and/or a little bit Dark Net, depending what your take is, but I don't know another word. The feeling of calm and success and the happiness at harvest is an American myth. There is no such

thing. You are constant threat of being wiped out. And that's not a negative statement, because it makes you step up to the ball. And I sit here after three hurricanes in three places where I grow rice: Texas, Carolina, Georgia, and Puerto Rico. And I've got to tell you, Anson Mills is up here in Columbia because this is the only place I could hub out, because I set out—I had a national audience in mind when I did this, and my first big clients were in New York, New England, and California, not here. I got a very lukewarm reception to everything here, with the exception of Celeste Albers and George—thanks, Celeste and George—because they knew what I was doing. They understood it, but they were about the only people that did. Not even Mitch and Barry understood it back then. As a matter of fact, when I told them, they said, “You're going to do what? Wait. You build hotels. What?” You know? I think Mitch is still saying that, as a matter of fact, twenty years later. So the idea of Columbia is it's above the flood line, and then it wasn't in the last two years, but this is above the flood line. Even though when you're in this building right now, we're sitting, the flood line is two feet above the floor we're sitting on the chairs on, and it is marked on the outside of the building. So I didn't get biosecurity completely, but the mill is above the flood line, and it is on the same site where a mill has been for 200 years.

[1:29:16.0]

Kate Medley: No shit.

[1:29:17.2]

Glenn Roberts: No shit. Right? So there was a bit of security in that. And so the reason why we're in this lovely structure is because it's about 115 miles from me witnessing Hurricane Hugo firsthand, because I did leave town. I did not stay in town overnight in Charleston for Hugo, but I left that afternoon and I came back the next day, and I had to actually pretty much walk back in the last ten miles because you couldn't drive downtown. I went to babysit our properties downtown, because we had a lot of real estate that I was in charge of at the time, and so I was in the building for a week and a half with no power, and it was hot and nasty and smelly, and God knows it looked like the end of the world. And I said, "Okay, there's no way I'm going to ever build a business in a coastal flood zone ever again." I said, "I'm too old. I don't want to go through this again." And it was nonstop.

We pulled the restaurant back into operation, that I was staying in because there was no place else to go, and there wasn't even running water. We went and bottled water from another town and brought it back to Charleston and used the water that way, violated all the health laws and opened the restaurant on candlelight. We had gas, we just didn't have electricity, so we opened the restaurant on candlelight and started with sixty covers the first night and two hundred covers the next night, and I was doing it with no staff. Essentially, I had one cook, and the chef wasn't there, and I had two servers that were part of the restaurant and a bunch of volunteers, and we just slammed it together and started serving food. And I said, "Okay, I'm doing this, but I'm never going to do this again either. This is it." So when—

[Recorder turned off]

[1:31:05.7]

Kate Medley: Describe to someone who's never been here before what this place looks like.

[1:31:10.1]

Glenn Roberts: [Laughs] Well, there's two ways to look at this. We're proud because it's Constan Car Wash. We're proud because Roxanne, who was employed there in 1951, now runs it, so it's a woman-run car wash, and she's still there and she's the boss. And Leroy Blanding is still there, and he, I think, came to work in 1953 and he's still there. So there's an *amazing* amount of depth in black community, because it is a black woman-run car wash. It's owned by the Smith family. Chip Smith still takes a hands-on interest in his own business, and he's an incredible businessperson, and his brother, Grant, and other brother, Houston, are the landlords here at Anson Mills. This was the car wash welding facility for fifty-two car washes in the South in the day, and where you're sitting right now in this derelict, nasty brick building was the corporate offices, and it was the height of lavish entertainment back in the day. Witness the fact, I showed you this beautiful—see that squeak—this beautiful black *electric range* with its own sink and refrigerator built in, all to one composite piece, and it's black enamel with gold finish. And I don't even know what this company is. I've never even heard of it.

[1:32:36.9]

Kate Medley: You'll cook for us later on, right?

[1:32:38.7]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah, that's it, right? So this was actually kind of spiffy back in the day, and "back in the day" means forty years ago, fifty years ago. But it's rundown, and so Anson Mills is in a nasty metal building that's elevated up off the parking lot at dock height, and it has some satellite buildings. One's at dock height and one's on the ground. One used to be the bays where they did some really heavy-duty car repair stuff, and we use that as storage. Then this office complex is next to the car wash.

The car wash is still active, and you can get your car washed there, and it's kind of fun, because it hasn't changed since 1952. Architecturally, it's the first inverted flying-wing car wash on the East Coast and the second only in the United States, but you have to be an architectural nerd to even know that or appreciate it. And the last thing to say about it is, I tell everybody, including myself, every time I walk outside, I take a breath, because I'm such an architectural detail nerd, the enameled white runner with red stripe steel tile that goes around the inverted wing is irreplaceable and it is a precious architectural commodity. I'm surprised it's still there, and don't anybody take it. It's limited to Exxon in its original Esso forms, and it's a special process, and to get it architecturally is almost impossible. And it's just sitting up there, and it's seventy, eighty years old, whatever it is, and it looks fairly brand new. It's the only thing there that looks brand new. They have the original Esso pumps over there too. Everybody drives by and doesn't even notice. It's one of those you can crank with your hand, right? So it goes way back.

[1:34:22.5]

Kate Medley: Who was your first client?

[1:34:26.2]

Glenn Roberts: My very first client—

[1:34:30.3]

Kate Medley: Very first sale.

[1:34:32.1]

Glenn Roberts: Believe it or not, it was six. You ready? Annie Quatrano, Bacchanalia, who went crazy because she was getting grits from a bootlegger, and she got it immediately, [snaps fingers] like that. Lydia Shire, Jonathan Waxman—go figure—Tom Keller, because we knew him. Catherine knew him, I knew him, we'd worked with him. And he wouldn't buy grits, so we made polenta. He said, "I won't buy grits, but if you grow some Italian maize and make polenta from it, I'll buy that."

So I said, "What's Italian maize?" I think that's how dumb I was. "Italian maize? Is that what you do to the field once you grow the corn?" [Laughter] I didn't even know maize was corn when I was thinking about that. I was like, "Who calls corn maize? Stop and think about it, that doesn't make sense." And I hadn't even stopped to think that I was in Italy, and if I hadn't been so drunk, I'd remember that the polenta di mais was actually a food and it's made from corn. [Laughter] But whatever.

So we got some corn seed from the Po Valley, rice country, and put it in and grew it, and he went crazy; he loved it. So we were fresh-milling polenta for Tom Keller, and, boy, did that open up California. So pretty much it was a rocket right after that.

But it was Annie Quatrano, first one, not counting, you know, us in Charleston, because we had our own restaurants when I was doing this, so it wasn't actually Anson. I was Anson Mills because it was in Anson Restaurant in the fire lane with Mike Lata. Since Mike Lata's now world-famous, I guess I should say that. It was me and Mike Lata and a couple of Mike's souses that were in the hallway doing culinary sensory research, not knowing what the hell that meant. And I can remember how discerning Mike was, "Mm-hmm. Nah, that's not going to work," and he'd be tasting it. Mike actually suggested some processes that we're still using, right, about fresh milling. If we can get that hydrated faster, I think we can maintain a better flavor profile. Mike wouldn't give up. I mean, he was all over it. It's amazing how insightful he was. He would have done a better job, I think, at Anson Mills than me, but he happens to be a very talented chef and I'm not, so we're glad he's cooking.

[1:37:06.4]

Kate Medley: Stepping back for a second, what is a bootlegger's field and what is its relevance to this work?

[1:37:14.5]

Glenn Roberts: You can still do this, because it just happened to me last month. You're driving along, and out of the corner of your eye, a tree fell. Usually that's how you see it,

because there's going to be a hedgerow between you and a sightline if you're on a paved road. Occasionally you can see it in a dirt road if the dirt road's really screwed up. Or a tractor path, you're going to end up there. But if you're on a paved road and you're seeing this, it's because a tree fell, because nobody plants corn like this where you can see it, which is tall corn. All modern corn is crowded into its theater, lots of little arms are pointing straight up, tall corn spaced out and its arms are out because it's human and it's breathing and it's flapping its arms, and you can see that from a long way away. Tall corn sticks out, but you don't plant it where you can see it, and, frankly, in a satellite photograph, they can clock the distance between plants now and they can monitor that stuff. That's kind of screwed up the world.

But we have such wonderful new laws about micro distilleries now, it's a big threat to real bootleggers who just want to do what they've always done. One of my best friends, who still says he's in the trade—he hasn't brought me any booze this year, so I don't know, but he said, 'I want to make one more batch just to stick it to the man.'

I'm going, "Do you know you're crossing up all kinds of metaphors there, dude?" [Laughter] So that's an urban metaphor and you're bootlegging. [Laughter]

And he said, "Yeah, but it feels good."

And I said, "What, the booze or the metaphor?" Right?

So, tall corn, you know it when you see it, and the plants are spaced out, they're not close together, and the leaves are horizontal, they're not vertical, and the ears this time of year are down, and they're not harvested, by the way, because they're being field-ripened. So the other thing is that if the corn's still standing now, that's a bootlegger who really wants some good hooch, because he's field-ripening. He's got a new crop, it's on

the stalk, the ears have dropped, so they're pointing down, not up anymore, and when they've dropped, that's when they're drying and the husk is keeping the water off of them. So it's air-drying and it's drying down very, very slowly, and it's curing on the cob, which is a different phyto- and other resonant chemical process than if you take the corn off the cob.

So one can argue, from a very good bootlegging perspective, that most Americans have never even tasted corn because you don't shell it before it's ready, and you can't shell it before well past first frost if you want to actually taste it, right, as new crop corn. And the last thing is, a bootlegger only wants to work with new crop corn because it's more active in the mash. Yeast will go after new crop corn like a bandit. As soon as it starts to go dormant, you move back and you move to a different set of yeasts and you have a different flavor profile, and there is no distillery in America thinking this way either. Now that, except for hooch makers, it's still not out in commercial distilling. I work with the best distillers in the United States. I do R&D for them. I do it for free. That's why I get to work with them, because I learn a lot in those fermenting—those five foundation processes. Work with vinegar makers, too, work with lots of koji people, etcetera, etcetera. So those processes are really important to understand how the grain reacts in reverse. But no distillery in America is working with new crop corn, none, because it's all machine harvested and it's all air dried, and if you machine harvest it, it's not on the cob anymore, so you're not even getting the kind of—it's not even the same food when you do it that way. So get a distiller who can get a corn picker—New Idea is the best one—and crib up all those cobs and let them air dry, you got some real hooch, and that's how bootleggers work.

[1:41:29.6]

Kate Medley: You could do anything in the world with your life and life's work. Why grain?

[1:41:36.8]

Glenn Roberts: Well, it's going to be the topic of discussion Sunday night. The oldest intact medicinal, spiritual, and artistic group from ancient times in the world is the Druze culture and their huge pursuits from all the humanities, all the way into agriculture and then back. And for this, you take the small statement that the Bible starts with a primer on how to grow Emmer, mother, right? Druze are in and/or predate that same culture. And as I mentioned earlier, they're all women, and to be an elder you have to be older than sixty, and they have held the power of neutrality in all war and the power of feeding people through all calamities and successes and celebrations, because they are seed people. And that's where we're confused by a little recent phenomenon called the guilds, and I know lots of instances in the world where guilds people, which are men, unfortunately, are extraordinary. So nothing against the guilds, but the guilds came about because the advent of Celtic culture coming out of Druze culture, which ended up in something called the brewsters in the Celt world, that's Western Europe, where all women had political control and started to abuse it somewhat, and the guilds came to contravene that, and we lost that continuity. The Druze have never wavered. They just do seed. They don't monetize it. They make seed available so they can feed people. And it seems a lot more like how we view the many spiritual cultures that revolve in

India and surrounds, and if you look at the basic tenets of beliefs in both cultures, there's a lot of overlap. I'm not saying that there's any Buddhism in Druze culture, but there's a lot of meditation and there's a lot of interaction between human and plant, and you see that in every culture but modern agriculture. Nobody's singing to plants in modern agriculture when you think about industrial farming. They hire no soloist to go sing to plants.

So I could like go off the edge of the planet with the discussion about why there's interest in this direction on my part, but the bottom line is why this, because it's fundamental to every facet of existence, period. It's just like the cosmos. This is part and parcel of how you can look inside an atom, to me. And it's not just me, because I'm not peer-reviewed and I am not a postdoc, but if you look in forty-eight hours, the seven best geneticists in the Western Hemisphere are going to be sitting at the same table. I get to sit there and listen to them talk. There's a reason for that, because they're all looking at subatomic phenomena with regard to how to keep the planet on track and feed people. That's how they get into that job. It's not because they like academics. They're just driven to it. I like being a groupie in that orbit, because the same motivation, I think, motivates me. I don't have any contributions, but I'm part of the network that does the positive contributive side that says, "Okay, you need to eat. We need to eat." Believe it or not, it can get that basic. Can we eat? That's a question. That's not an answer, right? And that's what drives me, because I at one point was in a place where I was not allowed to eat because I had no resources and didn't know how to go get food. And it was a big lesson. I was stranded in the middle of BF Nowhere with no water and no food. That's different in a desert. So from that experience, I learned that you can control that destiny

somewhat, and I end up here. I think cereal, legume, soil, seeds is the basis of all human activity and all biotics, and hence the planet, hence the eclipse, hence you name it. It's all the same thing to me.

[1:46:34.7]

Kate Medley: That's the end of my questions. Are there things I haven't asked you about that—

[1:46:41.3]

Glenn Roberts: My God in heaven, no. I don't know. It's all just a big blur to me, to tell you the truth. [Laughter] I get timelines wrong all the time. The only constant I have is Kay, right, really. That's extraordinary at my age. I thought there'd be more to it than that, but, no, that's it. It's just the end of the day, it's, "Hi, Kay, how you doin'?" And if she's mad, then I'm mad, and if she's happy, then I'm happier or whatever. I don't know. That's it.

[1:47:09.6]

Kate Medley: That's pretty good.

[1:47:10.9]

Glenn Roberts: Yeah.

[End of interview]