Anne Byrn
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Annemarie N.: All right. Good afternoon. This is Annemarie Nichols recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm at the home of Anne Byrn in Nashville, Tennessee. Let's get started. Could you start and tell me a little bit about your home, and how that connects to your family history?

[00:00:20]

Anne B.: Absolutely. Well, today I live in an old limestone, 1928 home that my grandfather built in Nashville a while back. It was where my father was raised, here, as an only child. About three or four years ago, the family who had bought it from my grandfather many years ago and had raised their family here wanted to sell it. They approached myself and my husband about it. So, we renovated the home and now are living in history; we're living where my father grew up, and it's really wonderful. But I am a native of Nashville and I had two sisters. I grew up in a family that was just deeply rooted here in this area and also loved food.

[00:01:11]

Annemarie N.: Could you tell me a little bit, what were your sisters' names?

[00:01:14]

Anne B.: I have an older sister named Ginger and a younger sister named Susan. So, we were all three red-headed girls. We were born in the [19]50s, grew up in the [19]60s and [19]70s, and we had a really pretty quiet and uninteresting life. [Laughter] We had a lot of family around. We had woods to roam in. We went on old-fashioned family vacations that,

sometime, involved camping. [Laughter] Cross-country to Portland, Oregon, with some organization my father was involved in. We just had a good life growing up, yeah.

[00:01:50]

Annemarie N.: That's good. Could you talk a little bit about your mother? Because I know that she and you have a really strong connection with food.

[00:01:59]

Anne B.: Very much so. My mother's name was Bebe, and she was the youngest of five girls, and so that's why they named—her sisters—named her Bebe, for Baby. Her given name was Emily Anne, but she was known her whole life as Bebe. She was the great entertainer and the great cook. I think when you're the fifth of five girls, you wear anything that's leftover . . . [Laughter] You are accustomed to a lot of frivolity and a lot of chaos in the room, and that's the way my mother loved it. So, she wasn't happy—growing up, she didn't want a family dinner or Easter lunch with five or ten people, she wanted fifteen or twenty. And so, her dinners and her dinner parties and her gatherings were really large. Because of that, she cooked a lot. She didn't really know how to cook when she got married—I think that was pretty common of that era, the women who were in the 1940s as either teenagers or young women really had to work or be in the armed forces. So, she didn't really have time for that, but she learned quickly and she was a very creative woman. She raised flowers and she dried them in her attic of our house, and made flat flower arrangements. Just really creative. So, the food she made was delicious and beautiful. I was lucky and grew up a part of that.

[00:03:27]

Annemarie N.: Can you talk about some of your favorite recipes or things that she made?

[00:03:31]

Anne B.: Mm. She made terrific fried chicken. In fact, I was trying to duplicate it last night. [Laughter] But she fried it in an electric skillet, which is what people did in the 1960s, I think, and [19]70s, you know. The electric skillet was this new appliance; in the kitchen it was so much better, they thought, than the cast iron skillet. So, it's so funny, but it did fry great chicken. She made really beautiful cakes, chocolate cake in particular. She made great candy, she made a toffee, she made every year for Christmas. Beautiful breads. My parents traveled a couple of times to Ireland, because they have Scottish and Irish ancestry and they were interested in that country. My mother tried the breads of Ireland and she would come back and kind of put those principles to work and bake more breads, or . . . she was a very open-minded cook, and she liked to try new things. She liked to try new vegetables. But probably her bedrock was her fried chicken, rice, milk gravy, and her chocolate cake, yeah.

[00:04:36]

Annemarie N.: That sounds good.

[00:04:37]

Anne B.: It was pretty good.

[00:04:42]

Annemarie N.: Could you tell me a little bit about . . . um, let's see. I want to talk a little bit maybe about your college career. Why did you decide to go to University of Georgia and Grady College of Journalism?

[00:05:01]

Anne B.: Right. Well, you know, I went to Georgia because I wanted to do something different with my life. Believe it or not, at that time, that seemed different. I had been accepted to Vanderbilt and Emory. Most of my family here in Nashville had gone to Vanderbilt, and I didn't want to do that. I'd also been to a girls' high school, and I really wanted to go to a college where there were boys. I really wanted to go to an SEC school where there'd be football. So, I set certain priorities. Georgia, of the mix, Georgia had the best journalism school in the South. I was the editor of my high school newspaper, so I've always kind of been interested in newspapers; I've liked reporting and learning new things and putting stories together and then actually seeing the finished product; knowing about something first. So, I knew I wanted to go to journalism school, it's just, how could I combine that with a need to get out of the box? Which is why I went to Georgia. And it worked out really well for me because, when I went down there to look at the school, I found out that I could do a double major. I didn't have to spend all of my time in the journalism school. Which was interesting. Then I remember my father turning to me when we were doing a tour of the school and he said, “Well, you know, you're a really good cook, Anne.” He said, “You probably could take some classes over at the Home Ec school.” I went, that's

not a bad idea. So we went to look at the Home Ec School, which is what it was called then. Now, it's Family and Consumer Sciences, but back then, it was Home Ec School. There were classes not only in nutrition and food chemistry but equipment and textiles. It was really exotic sort of stuff that I had never—I had never taken a Home Ec course in my life. I thought, this is really interesting. You know, what do people do with this information? So, I chose Georgia. I had decided that I would try to take as many classes as I could over at the Home Ec School. As it turned out, I also was interning at my hometown newspaper, the *Nashville Banner*, which was the afternoon paper. I interned there every Christmas holiday and every summer during college. When I would go back to Georgia after the summer, I exempted out of all of these required and elected courses because I had already been covering the news in Nashville. I covered fires and train wrecks and Fort Campbell, and Elvis's death in 1976. I covered a lot of—I covered a lot of things on Capitol Hill. I'd taken dictation from reporters there. I didn't have to take the classes when I got back to school. So I used those hours at the Home Ec School. It was pretty fun. [Laughter]

[00:07:54]

Annemarie N.: That's nice.

[00:07:54]

Anne B.: Yes.

[00:07:55]

Annemarie N.: So, to get the time right for the record, so you were only interning at the *National Banner*—the *Nashville Banner*, sorry, I can't talk today—during college? You didn't do that during high school?

[00:08:07]

Anne B.: I did, actually, do one internship during high school as well. But most of my time was there during college. Then, you know, fast forward many years; we wind up back here in Nashville, and I end up working for their competing newspaper, which is the *Tennessean*, right.

[00:08:30]

Annemarie N.: You're talking about you were interested in journalism in high school. What was your initial interest? Or did you have anybody who influenced you into joining the school paper?

[00:08:43]

Anne B.: Right. That's a good question. I haven't really thought about it. I think I just have always been—I've liked to do things that were different, and maybe I played a few sports, but didn't excel at sports like some girls did. I wasn't—I probably am innately creative, but I was never given any art instruction, so I wouldn't have spent my time with art or music. I had to take piano for eight years, but I endured that. [Laughter] I think that the newspaper was a mixture of creative. It was assessing, working on deadline. I am a project-based person; I figured out now, in my life, I love new projects and I like to work

on them and complete them. That's what newspaper is all about. You've got to be able to go out, report on a story, do the research, pull it all together. You have to do it on a timeframe. I love putting together the newspaper because there was a lot of camaraderie to that, and I loved the other—my friends who also were on the newspaper. We enjoyed spending time together. I think that definitely translated into my early years at the newspaper, you know, when I got out of college. It was a very social place. It was fun.

[00:10:02]

Annemarie N.: That's awesome. I want to talk, too, about—we'll get back to Grady College of Journalism, kind of jumping around here—but you mentioned working at the *Banner*. You worked mostly in the main section of the newspaper, you didn't work in features or in . . . food editors.

[00:10:26]

Anne B.: Right, I was news. Yes.

[00:10:27]

Annemarie N.: But you had kind of a relationship with Bernie Arnold?

[00:10:30]

Anne B.: I did, yeah.

[00:10:30]

Annemarie N.: Could you talk about that?

[00:10:31]

Anne B.: Yeah, that's—yes, I worked on the news desk, which meant that when something terrible happened and there was no full-time reporter to go, they would send the intern. That's how I covered Elvis's death, because nobody else was in the newsroom on that Sunday night. But I did have—and I dealt with it. I wasn't all that interested in the stories that I covered. But I was interested in the features department, and I found that those . . . they were mostly women, were a little different than the news guys. They were a little kinder, they were a little bit more laid back. And they were very welcoming. So, I did go and visit with Bernie. I was interested in what she was covering and writing about. I read her food section every week. And she got in all of these cookbooks, you know. I thought this was the most awesome job because you would get all these free cookbooks from publishers. She just had shelves of them. I would go through her cookbooks on lunch hour, and a lot of times, she would just send me home with them. That's how I started my cookbook collection. [Clock Chimes]

[00:11:42]

Annemarie N.: That's great. Could you talk a little bit about some of the things that she wrote and how she influenced you?

[00:11:47]

Anne B.: Yeah. I think that, back then—and that would have been in the 1970s—there was still a style of food reporting then where the food editor writer would go out and interview the woman of the house. Or, the fireman in the fire hall. And you would find out what their favorite recipe is and what was on the menu that day, and you would share those recipes with the readers of Nashville or wherever. It was very local-based. It was very much reporting on your community. I think that really stuck with me. Nashville was that sort of town; I mean, it was much smaller than it is today. People were interested in Southern cooking, and they were interested in what maybe someone from Mount Juliet or Madison or Donelson or Belle Meade, whatever they were cooking, they wanted to read about it. It was just the way food writing was done then. You would not have written about something like tomatoes, had you not been able to interview someone who grows them or who was making a terrific tomato salad or something like that.

[00:13:01]

Annemarie N.: That's awesome. So . . . so you're talking a little bit about, sorry, I have to collect my thoughts.

[00:13:16]

Anne B.: That's okay.

[00:13:16]

Annemarie N.: You're talking about you're interested in features. Could you talk a little bit about some of the classes that you took at UGA, in the Journalism Department and in the

Home Economics Department, and some professors who might have influenced you? Or who really impacted you?

[00:13:42]

Anne B.: Yeah. Well, I have to say, I think because I had so much on the job experience working for the *Banner* all through college, that I enjoyed being on the job in the newsroom much better than being in class. And that is the truth. Often time, I found myself second-guessing the professor or filling in the blanks of what they were saying, and I felt like some of the assignments that were assigned to me just weren't useful. I never told my parents that, because I didn't want them to think that what they were paying for my college was a complete waste, but I don't think it was . . . I think, at the time, what I was doing was the best use of my time. But at the same time, I needed to get an education and I needed the credentials. I could have never gotten a job outside like I did in Atlanta had I not had a degree from the Grady School of Journalism. So, there you go. I did enjoy the magazine writing classes the best because, I think, it was a long sort of form journalism, and it was a greater bit of research. I know I did one story on the luxury hotel rooms of Atlanta, about the same time the Peachtree Plaza—or was it the Hyatt Regency—downtown with the revolving dome top to it, was being built. It was great. I contacted all of the, I think, the marketing directors for the main hotels in Atlanta and they gave me the tours of their most expensive rooms. So, I did a story for this, for a magazine course. They sent me pictures because, back then, you would have taken a photographer with you to illustrate it. Photojournalism was different and new. That was putting words to pictures. Photography and journalism were separate in those days. So,

the pictures were furnished by the hotels. But I really did enjoy it, because it got me out of my bubble. It got me out of Athens, Georgia, and it got me in Atlanta. I got to write a bigger piece, and I think that was really helpful. As far as the Home Ec School, it was interesting in its own right, completely different from the journalism school. The instructors tended to skew female and older. The worst grades I made were in the cooking class because I wouldn't follow directions. [Laughter] I got a C, and I think it was because my meal was an Italian meal, and we were furnished—we were given the recipes, which I thought was really lame. They should have made us come up with the recipes. But we were given the recipes, and I didn't follow the directions for the bread because I didn't like it. I changed it. So, I got a C in that course. It always bugged me. That was the only one. It ended up being my profession. [Laughter] It ended up being what I do. I think it sort of says what I do, which is not necessarily follow the directions, and you never know where you're going to wind up. So, I like that. I had to take some required courses, like in equipment. I had to do a project on the vacuum cleaner, which was dreadful. [Laughter] Just dreadful. So there were a lot of components that were just, I think, really, really outdated. On the other hand, I had to take food science and chemistry, and that was good for me, because little did I know that I would end up using that on down the road when I was reporting about nutrition or I had to react quickly for the news side of the *Journal Constitution* on a piece that was nutrition. You know, some new study had released data on, and they wanted me to spin it for the next day's paper. I think having had that background in chemistry allowed me to do that, so, that was really good. I tell that to people today: if you are even interested in writing about food, go study food chemistry, because it'll really help you later on.

[00:18:06]

Annemarie N.: That's really great. I wanted to ask you, you mentioned how you worked at the news desk while you were at the *Tennessee Banner*. What was it like being a young woman working there? What were the demographics of the newsroom, and how were you treated?

[00:18:23]

Anne B.: I was treated like a young girl. It's funny you say that. It was mostly all-male. The desk itself was all-male. The managing editor was male. The city editor was male, he was insane. The Capitol Hill reporters were all male. There was one female reporter—two. One was an older woman, she covered religion. And then, there was a young reporter who was about three or four years older than me, and we ended up being really good friends and are still friends today. She ended up writing just on every news beat, whatever, just lots of energy, relentless. But it was mostly male. I think because I was in college, they treated me like—most of the guys treated me like their sister or their daughter. It wasn't predatory at all. I didn't really find that until I was a young woman working for the Atlanta papers. But I think people, they were really kind. But I was definitely a girl. I was put on the phone to take the dictation that came through from the Capitol Hill reporters, and I had to type it at like ninety miles an hour, and I couldn't type very well. [Laughter] That was the worst thing, whereas probably the male intern who was working the summer with me got to actually be on Capitol Hill. There's the difference, yeah. They assumed I was a better typist and they were wrong. [Laughter]

[00:19:53]

Annemarie N.: Could you talk about, you mentioned having to write the story of Elvis's death. Could you talk about that night and that experience?

[00:20:01]

Anne B.: [Laughter] That is still imprinted in my brain. It was a Sunday night. It was in August, and it was before I was going back to college. I was, you know, of course living at home. I was with my parents. I was working Sunday night beat, and I was the lone reporter in the newsroom outside of the weekend city editor, and the UPI and AP wire rooms were next the newsroom. The guys that would sit there and watch that tape and watch those news feeds come in came running into the city room and screamed, Elvis has died. Well, the city editor looked at me. He looked around at the newsroom like, who's going to cover this story? I was it. So he said, "Anne, you're on." They called down to photo, and a photographer appeared. Before I left, he said, "You better tell your parents you're not going to be home tonight." And I did! I called them, I said," I don't think I'm going to be in tonight." We drove around Nashville all night because word—I'm trying to think, it must have gone on how people found out about it. We told a lot of people, and we had found out from word of mouth people who were just Elvis devotees. I mean, Memphis and Nashville were not that far away from each other. In many respects, light years different, but it was still a part of Tennessee, and people loved Elvis. So we went around all night and interviewed Elvis fans and took pictures of all of their memorabilia, yeah. So that story, then I came back and wrote the story, and that went 1A. It was top of the

page. I'll never forget, my dad was so proud. He did. [Laughter] He was so proud. He was supposedly holding that newspaper up at work and showing everybody. That newspaper, that story, got me out of a couple of classes, I think, in the fall. [Laughter] I exempted another news reporting class because of all this. It was a riot. But you know, I think that's something about life and also about that form of journalism; you're oftentimes put in situations that you're not equipped for, but you just have to have faith in yourself and realize, if you have the skills, it's going to work out. And you do the best that you can. And you just ask good questions and take good notes, and you'll be able to pull it together, yeah.

[00:22:41]

Annemarie N.: That's a really good lesson to learn. What were some of the other really big things that you learned, either skills or just lessons in being a journalist that you learned there that you didn't learn when you were at UGA?

[00:22:55]

Anne B.: Yeah. To listen. I think listening is probably the top skill. It is more important than the questions you ask, the ability to listen and, I think, be perceptive about people. I learned to just kind of take mental notes about people. I still think, because of that, I'm able to sense when someone's upset or when things are not right, that's sort of translated into my being a mother and raising children, the ability to do that. Also, it gives you a sense of confidence to be a reporter and have to be in situations where you're not a hundred percent comfortable, because you have a job to do and you're just doing your job and

you're just trying to gather information. I was always fiercely proud of that, and fiercely proud of the profession of journalism and have taken up for it my entire life. Anyone who bashes journalists or newspapers or whatever usually doesn't want to sit across from me at the dinner table. [Laughter] I think listening, being confident, and not afraid to ask the hard question. However, you usually ask the hardest question last. Yeah. Warm 'em up. [Laughter]

[00:24:29]

Annemarie N.: That's good. So you did two really disparate things, you have this food aspect. Did you double major in food and journalism?

[00:24:40]

Anne B.: I did. As it turned out, at graduation, I had more hours in the Home Ec School. [Laughter] So I got a Bachelor of Science. Yes. But that's okay with me. In Home Economics and Journalism, yeah. Double major.

[00:24:55]

Annemarie N.: Could you talk a little bit about starting off? So, your first career was with the *AJC*.

[00:25:00]

Anne B.: Correct, with the *Atlanta Journal*. Yes, I was graduating early. I had exempted a lot of classes, I had doubled up on some, and I didn't know I could graduate early by my senior

year. So I decided, a lot of people hung around, I was kind of done with college, and I thought it would just give me two or three months to find a job. As it turned out, I was working on my resume and the journalism school, I thought I would probably apply to magazines or maybe *Southern Living*, maybe to be a consumer affairs, you know, officer for a company. I heard through the dean at the Home Ec School that the food writer for the *Atlanta Journal* had just quit. Word had traveled. She said, "You know, you really ought to apply for it, because you have the credentials." So I thought, what the heck? You know? So, I got my resume together and I mailed it to the managing editor at the journal. So he got back and he got in touch with me, and we set up an interview. I drove to Atlanta and I interviewed with him. I brought my clips. And he was interested in my clips. He wanted to hire—he didn't care that I was young, and I was young. I was not even twenty-two. But he really wanted my youth and my news background, and then he asked me if I could fry chicken. [Laughter] Which you can never get away with saying today. He said, "Well, can you fry chicken?" I said, "Yes, sir, I can fry chicken." He said, "Okay, well, you're hired." That was sort of the story of the *Atlanta Journal* then. I mean, can you make deadline and can you fry chicken? You know, little did I know that I was following in the footsteps of some legends. And also in Atlanta was a unique situation: two newspapers, morning and afternoon, that competed. They were different in their times they were published but also in their coverage politically. The afternoon paper was the *Atlanta Journal*. It tended to skew a little bit more conservative. And the *Atlanta Constitution*, which is probably the more regarded paper. It was known more; was a little bit more liberal. But both had longtime columnists who had been there forever. Celestine Sibley and Lewis Grizzard and Furman Bisher. I really—if I had known all of that when I

was interviewing, I would have been a nervous wreck. But I just got this wonderful opportunity to work in the newspaper world, and then just in the food department. I inherited bookcases full of books that had been opened and used by Henrietta Dull. She was there from the early 1900s through till about 1940, and then Grace Hartley was there at the *Journal* for another twenty, thirty years. Then Judy Sherrod was there briefly, and then myself, and I was there fifteen years. During the time I was there at the *Journal*, the papers merged. That would have been about 1984, 1985. My competitor was at the time was Jean Thwaite, who was then the editor for the *Atlanta Constitution* and had been there for a good twenty years. When they merged, they named me food editor of both and Jean worked with me. It was not easy at first because she was older than me and she had had a long tenure and had a lot of friendships in the business. But we worked out something that was advantageous for both of us. I kind of did all the administrative that she didn't like anyway; she still got to go to the food conferences and see her friends and write the stories that she wanted to. So, we ended up good friends as a result.

[00:29:07]

Annemarie N.: That's good. Can you talk a little bit about what it was like being a young woman, just with experience on the news floor, and experiences just coming out of college, becoming an editor? I can imagine that would be a little bit of a nerve-wracking situation.

[00:29:22]

Anne B.: It was, and it was one of those where you had to learn when you went along. And you have to—I learned to develop relationships with people who could help me. I don't mean that in any kind of sinister way at all. It was look for people in the Atlanta community who would let me know more about food and enable me to learn more. One of those was Nathalie Dupree. Nathalie ran the Rich's cooking school in downtown Atlanta, and Nathalie brought in Julia Child and James Beard and Marcella Hazan and all these hugely famous people in the [19]70s and [19]80s. They cooked, they had cooking classes. Nathalie, we got to be friends, and Nathalie would let me attend the cooking classes just as a journalist or just as someone who wanted to perfect and get better at cooking. That was huge. At the same time, what was going on in Atlanta which was unique was that there were a lot of backyard cooking schools in women's homes, in their basements, in their garages. I think that that spoke to America's sort of love affair with French cooking and with everything European. These were women who, maybe they were—I hate to, they didn't work outside the home, but they were fabulous cooks. So they were able to go over to France and study. Several of them got involved in the travel industry, so they combined the food and the travel and they started taking food tours to France. So as a result is, a lot of the French chefs who they corresponded with came to Atlanta and taught classes in these cooking schools in peoples' homes, so that was going on. Huge influx coming into Atlanta of outside ideas, outside recipes I'd never heard of. Also what was happening in Atlanta at the time was, Atlanta was booming. Hartsfield Airport was being built. New airlines were coming in to the Atlanta airport. When a new airline came in from a different country, the foodways of that country came in through people who would relocate, the food service that was onboard the airline. I remember when Sabena

airlines, the Belgian airlines, came to Atlanta. I mean, they brought in Belgian chefs to sort of introduce Sabena to Atlanta. I had never seen anything like this before. Then the restaurant scene in Atlanta, the old, staid, original great restaurants like Hedgerose Heights, which was Heinz Schwab, Heinz Schwab started with Nikolai's Roof, which was the top of one of those downtown hotels. I think it was the Hyatt Regency, or maybe it was Peachtree Plaza. I think it was Hyatt Regency. That was Russian cooking. And he's a Swiss chef, Swiss or Austrian. Never in my life had I been exposed to this style of cooking, coming from Nashville, Tennessee as a Southerner. So I think so many unbelievable influences, because Atlanta was the boomtown, and it was all happening. The newspapers at that time were doing quite well and rates were up. Our food section, at one point, was thirty pages. It was huge. It was a staff. When our papers merged, we had a staff. We had a staff of four or five. We had photographers who just worked with us. We had layout people who just worked with us. We had two wine writers. We may have had a nutrition reporter. It was, you know, it was a staff to produce a thirty-page section every Wednesday. It was a lot. But it was good. It was good.

[00:33:26]

Annemarie N.: Sounds like it. I have a question about—it's kind of a two-part question. So you mentioned, at the beginning, how you got hired and this idea of, like, can you cook fried chicken? What was the culture within the *Atlanta Journal*, the culture of the food section and how other managing editors kind of wanted you to look? How did that contrast or conflict with the changing food scene of the city?

[00:33:58]

Anne B.: That's interesting. Well, they definitely, it was . . . you know, most of the high jobs at the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution*, the editor positions, they were mostly male. Although, Anne Cox Chambers was chairman of the board of the papers and she was a woman, but most of the jobs in news were male. I think that women were thought of as girls and as gals, and you just, I think as a young woman, you just learned who were your friends and who were not your friends. Like if I had taken any job out of college in Atlanta at the time, you would know what relationships you had with people were on the level and which ones were not, and those were skills you just had to develop. I was sent on a lot of stories. I was sent on stories at night and on weekends. I'll have to say, one of the best things was probably the photographers were wonderful. A lot of them were older men, and I was, like, their daughters' age. They were kind to me, really kind to me. Because you were in a car with a photographer a lot. If you were in a car with a creep, I think you would have figured it out. But these guys were great guys, and they'd been doing their work a long time. They took it seriously. But they really were kind, really, really kind. The people that worked at the Atlanta papers were good people, they really were. As far as what was going on at the time, I think we were just in a bubble. I think news journalists are sort of always in a bubble. Atlanta was booming, and yet, the newsroom was . . . probably as crazy as it was. I think smoking in the office, I think they still allowed people to smoke at their desks at the *Journal Constitution* up until, I'll bet . . 1988, [19]90. Seriously. It just was a bit of a zoo. I think, how could you work in that environment? I don't know, I couldn't do it today. But we did it because it was lively. You interacted with people in Sports and in Business. You knew those people. You

probably went out after work and had a beer with them. You may have played tennis with them on the weekends, or do something fun, or run the Peachtree Road Race. It was a really fun and good social life. And it was good for a young person.

[00:36:42]

Annemarie N.: Definitely. Could you talk to me about the relationships that you developed among your colleagues there?

[00:36:48]

Anne B.: Yeah. I think all good on the food desk. We all looked out for each other. Jean Thwaite, as I mentioned, that didn't . . . two papers coming together, that worked out well. Susan Puckett followed me, and we've remained good friends. Ah, what is it? I haven't kept up with any of the guys in Sports; they were always the ones who wanted to ask you for a date. They watched any new female hire get off the elevator. [Laughter] You had to beware the guys in sports. I have really good . . . I've run into a lot of the photographers, I think, over the years. Not so much the city editors or managing editors, but I think everyone . . . our department, our Features Department was very close. We would go up to Lake Lanier for the weekend together. There was a lot of fraternity. They were well run, the departments were well run. It was fun.

[00:37:51]

Annemarie N.: That's good. Could you talk a little bit about some of your responsibilities as a food editor there?

[00:37:57]

Anne B.: Um-hm, yeah. So, once I became food editor and the paper got larger, our section got larger, I not only had to schedule stories with other reporters, work with the photography department on getting art assigned for those, create deadlines, work with the layout person to get the—we would receive pages from advertising, because advertising, it was their job to sell ads on the page. Then we would receive these pages that would have holes in them, and the hole that was left, the space that was left on the page, would be news. So, I think that we would originally have to work with the layout people. The copy desk did most of the headline writing and editing, but we had to do some first-line editing. And that was a lot of work. But maybe more than that we, in the early years, we had a responsibility to the readers. We had to keep up with our readers, and there was no answering machines there, I think, until mid-[19]90s. The operator would put through any call to the food section. So, you knew when you were picking up your phone on your desk, it could be a PR firm in New York wanting you to cover something, or it could be someone whose chicken had burned or somebody who was upset because you don't write enough Jell-O recipes, or . . . [Laughter] you know, who really loves red velvet cake, and do you want her recipe right then? And we took those calls. We took every single one of 'em. And we talked to people. Some people were very hard to get off the phone, but that was the way that food editors and writers were known to the community, as someone who not only created content but provided instruction. And another, when you ask about who else did I sort of partner with when I was young and didn't know, another really important part of this is that the county extension agents became my best friends, because

They were a constant source of information about canning and gardening, and these were things that, as a young woman, I didn't know about those things. I had never put up peach preserves. I had never gardened. My father had a vegetable garden, I hadn't gardened. But so, to have the resource and have county extension agents who not only did that, but they knew people in each county who did that, and so if I needed sources for a story that I was writing, say, on peaches, well they may say, well, you know, there's a great peach orchard down in whatever county, Tift County. I can put you in touch with that person. That's how we did a lot of the reporting, was through county extension agents. That was helpful. I think that was, back to the University of Georgia, there was a required course I had to take there to graduate and it was called "Contemporary Georgia," and I had to memorize all the counties of Georgia and their county seats and all the rivers, and spell all the rivers correctly. It was—I don't think they do that anymore. [Laughter] At the time, I thought, this is completely useless. I will never use this information again. And then, lo and behold! [Clock Chimes] I could tell you every county seat in Georgia, you know? I was in touch with their extension service folks, and it was great. I ended up actually taking, realizing that I needed to know more about canning, I took the classes offered by the DeKalb County Food Service in food preservation. So, I learned how to can green beans, and I learned how to can strawberry preserves and peach preserves, and I got my Master Canner status. So, really happy that I did that, too.

[00:42:05]

Annemarie N.: That's awesome. So, you were talking a little bit about your audience, and how you have this really close connection with them. How did the audience kind of influence what you guys decided to write in the food section?

[00:42:20]

Anne B.: Hmm. I think it filled in the gaps, because you may have known when you planned the food calendar that you had to report on tomatoes because it was July. And you knew that you had to write something for the Fourth of July. But what else are you going to write about? And what else is on everybody's mind? Who are these people that you're going to interview? Folks on the phone gave you that feedback. Also another way to get that feedback was through our recipe swap columns, which were hugely popular. People would write in—honestly, they would write in. There was no e-mail—they would write in, and they would request a recipe, or they would share a recipe. And then that became this wonderful way of communicating with readers, was to recipe swap and say, you know, Mary Smith in Mableton, Georgia, is looking for a Jell-O salad recipe that has cottage cheese and chopped celery in it. You would get six or seven recipes for Jell-O salad with cottage cheese and chopped celery in it in the mail in the next week, and then hopefully, test them. That was something that we brought to the food section that I think had not always been in place, was that we brought in the ability to test recipes before they went into print, through the test kitchen that was built at the *Journal Constitution*. Also, we hired recipe testers to do this at home, if we couldn't test it ourself.

[00:43:57]

Annemarie N.: That's awesome. So you guys had funding for recipe testing?

[00:43:59]

Anne B.: We did. This was the 1980s, and it was really important to make sure. I think a large part, with the editors that were coming in, knew people were coming in from other newspapers—bigger newspapers knew the importance of recipes being correct, and the downside of errors and the reprints and people really upset with you because you had a typo in the recipe. It was really important to get recipes right. That was something that has stayed with me forever, and that is, when I write cookbooks today, is my newspaper background, is getting the recipe right and making a personal connection to the reader.

[00:44:39]

Annemarie N.: Can you talk a little bit about how you guys recipe tested? Who did that while you were there?

[00:44:45]

Anne B.: Yeah. We would either do it ourself or we had three or four people who worked on a freelance basis. We would send them the recipes to test, and they would give us feedback. We'd send a photographer to their home. These were women who had some cooking experience, so they knew what they were doing. I think a couple of times, I asked maybe Nathalie Dupree and her group of cooks to test some recipes for us. It never was perfect. We were never as large as, say, the *Chicago Tribune* or *L.A. Times* or *New York Times*.

We were that newspaper that was just underneath them, so we didn't have that funding, you know? Or that audience. We just did the best we could, and we got better at it.

[00:45:37]

Annemarie N.: Could you talk a little bit about the times you got to cook at Rich's? What was it like? Can you talk about some of those really neat, important cooks that you got to cook with?

[00:45:51]

Anne B.: Yeah. Well, my favorite was Julia Child. And I've got a picture of her that's in my kitchen with us. She was coming for one of her many book stops, book tours, and her husband, Paul, was with her. I got to sit after the class, after she did the class, and she I believe did roast chicken, and a cheese soufflé. She sat down at the table next to me, and the photographer for the newspaper snapped a picture of me, and I . . . you know, have kept it through these years. It's been about thirty-five years. And I was just a very young girl, and she was a grown woman, very commanding woman, and had a very charming husband. He was lovely. But to be able to sit at the table with her . . . and that started a friendship I continued with Julia. I didn't see her a lot, but she did remember me. I did leave the paper on a leave of absence for about six months in 19 . . . I guess it was 1983, [19]82 or [19]83. I went to France, to Paris, and took cooking classes at La Varenne because I felt like Atlanta was booming, I was being required to write on a different style of cooking, a more elevated style of cooking, than I had been used to, and I needed training. They were urging me to start reviewing restaurants. I said, “I'm not reviewing

any restaurants until I have training." So I went to France and studied at La Varenne, and Julia Child was in and out of that school a couple of times. I got to interview her then there. Then when she turned eighty, I was able to go to Cambridge, to her house, and cook with her in her kitchen for her eightieth birthday. I brought her a peach. It was in August, and I brought her a peach from Georgia, wrapped it up in a towel and put it in my bag and took it with me. [Laughter] I had to bring Julia Child something, but what do you bring Julia Child? You know? But she loved it, and so then we peeled the peach and we shared the peach. She was definitely one. You know, Nathalie was a great teacher herself. One, I think, important class I remember from Nathalie was just on making soup. It was probably just a chicken and rice soup. But she gave—there were twelve students, and she gave all of us, we had a tray with the ingredients, and we had the recipe. Then we had no instruction. She just said, "Make the soup. Follow the recipe, make the soup, and then we're going to taste everybody's soup." Well, when we all finished, we looked at everybody's soup, and they all looked completely different. There was a big lesson for me, that the words chop an onion to you, and to myself, mean completely different things. It's how large you chop the onion pieces. Do you mince them? Or are you just roughly chopping it and throwing it in the pot? It tells you to sauté the onion a little bit first in butter, but how long are you sautéing it? Are you in a hurry and you just run it around the pan? Or are you more patient, and you give it time? Is the heat cranked up a little higher and so it caramelizes? And then the flavor is more intense. If you're caramelizing the onion, you're probably caramelizing the carrots and everything else going in, so the color of your stock is going to be slightly darker, and it's going to be more flavorful. That was a revelation. Because until then, I had thought a recipe was a

recipe. And I realized that there was huge human error possibility. When you write a recipe, you cannot assume that anyone is going to make it the same way that you make it. So, when you write a recipe, you need to create some fallback in there. If you tell them to throw the onion in the pot and sauté it, you give them a visual—until it is soft, until it is caramelized, about four to five minutes. That really changed the way that I write recipes, and how today, how I write a cookbook recipe.

[00:50:19]

Annemarie N.: That's really interesting. Could you talk a little bit about how the food section evolved during your fifteen years there, and during this huge time of growth for Atlanta?

[00:50:34]

Anne B.: Yeah. I think it evolved because it started simply. That was because newspapers maybe didn't have big food sections, but as newspapers in the [19]80s and into the [19]90s saw that a food section was a really important part of the newspaper and brought in a readers, brought in a lot of advertising, then we got more space. When you have more space, you have more space to fill, you have a larger staff and you can report on a greater variety of topics. Then the reader really benefits, because you've got this fabulous food section. So, I think the size of the section really impacted it. Also, just what was going on in the rest of the country; the emphasis and the shift toward, away from an emphasis on European and French and more on American cooking. 1985, probably, was the big year where the American chefs really kind of started coming into their own. San Francisco, Los Angeles, it all came out of Alice Waters' restaurant, Chez Panisse, in Berkeley. You know,

Jeremiah Tower, who worked with her then, started his restaurant, Stars, in San Francisco. Wolfgang Puck in Los Angeles area, Larry Forgione around Michigan. So, this influence of CIA-trained chefs really using regional ingredients from their neck of the woods, and that started changing things. I still think that Southern cooking was never given its due in those years. It was sort of pushed aside; Southern cooking is just Southern cooking. People were really more interested in the heartland and the Midwest and the New England foodways, and especially California. The cooking of the Southwest really gained in popularity at that time, so . . . I guess back to your question, how did the food section changed because what we were reporting on really opened up, and we were reporting on a lot bigger stories than before. We were used—and the world, and America, was more interested in food. So, there were more stories about nutrition, and people were interested in nutritional studies and the effect of this on you, and whether you should eat that. So, a lot of our coverage of food was based on news. It may have started as news, and then we flipped it to a food story. But when I started, it was really more of the food editor creating the agenda, interviewing the people for the bridge luncheons or whatever, the dinner parties. It just didn't have the backbone to it that it worked into.

[00:53:38]

Annemarie N.: Did you preserve that sense of community that kind of existed? How did you?

[00:53:43]

Anne B.: What do you mean, at the newspaper, or within what—?

[00:53:43]

Annemarie N.: Within the Atlanta community, because it seems like the food section especially, from the way you talk about it, you kind of like developed a sense of community. These women, and maybe men too, who are reading and consuming this, and they're writing in and they have a relationship with you guys as journalists, but I think in a wider sense, people in Atlanta who were reading the *Atlanta Journal* or *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, and also outside of that, because it also has regional influence.

[00:54:15]

Anne B.: Mm-hm, exactly.

[00:54:15]

Annemarie N.: So, how—sorry, this is kind of long, but—

[00:54:19]

Anne B.: No, how did we keep sort of that old, that originally the heart of the paper, the heart of the food section, in these times of changing times and bigger issues and all that?

[00:54:31]

Annemarie N.: Yes.

[00:54:31]

Anne B.: You looked for a blend. So, we kept it by keeping those columns that people loved. It was sort of like, there was always a joke at the paper like, don't change anything that has to do with cartoons or the crossword puzzle or whatever, you know, or the TV listings. Thank goodness, don't mess with the TV listings! Well, that was kind of like, don't take recipe swap out of the food section because you're going to hear about it if you do. So, we would keep it in there. That was the way we kept that connection going. The other way, and it was just . . . it was . . . it was to ask people's—something I learned early, too, was to ask people's opinion. Even when I left Atlanta and moved back to Nashville, and my life went on, I continued to do that because, say you write on ripe garden tomatoes one week, you create a little box at the end of your column and it says, what are your favorite tomato recipes from your garden? Send them to us by next Monday. We'll try some and we'll print the ones we like the best. Well, you didn't even have to offer people money, because it was getting their name in the newspaper, people sharing, and it would not only make the readers very happy, but it showed to everybody that you were still anchored in your town. You were writing about Atlanta. And, it gave you another column. You could check another one off your list, because it extended the story.

[00:56:15]

Annemarie N.: That's great. How did this kind of new American renaissance in food, how did that translate into Atlanta, especially with Southern food not really getting its due?

[00:56:25]

Anne B.: It's interesting. It's a really good question. I never felt like the new Southern restaurants or foods were there when I was there. They certainly are now. Miller Union, I mean, there's so many great examples of restaurants that do the new Southern well, but it was not the case in the [19]80s or [19]90s. I think it was more, Atlanta was this big collection, melting pot, of so many different cultures. I mean, the DeKalb Farmer's Market opened in the time I was there, different groups of refugees that resettled into Atlanta. Buford Highway started having a flavor of its own, with all the different sort of Thai and Vietnamese restaurants. So, I think that—and soul food, you know, that area around just even the old restaurants that were sort of in Decatur and around the old Turner baseball field. They were still there. So, you had everything. If you wanted a culture, it was in Atlanta. I think that is what made Atlanta unique, definitely, in the South. It became the big city. It became the big city for food in the South, definitely. If you wanted really nice breads . . . it was all coming to in Atlanta. It was the airport, it was everything combined.

[00:58:09]

Annemarie N.: That's really interesting. I want to kind of go back to Rich's, too, because I think this kind of connects. Did you get a sense of its kind of, like, national or regional importance while you were there, cooking and getting to know Nathalie Dupree and some of these other people who were coming and helping her teach these classes?

[00:58:30]

Anne B.: I definitely did. I knew it was unique and special, and I'm glad that I did, because now I would look back at this and think, oh. I've told Nathalie many times she needs to write

her memoir. Not only in the school, Nathalie's day did not end at the end of the day. She would often carry it on, and it would be a dinner party that night in her apartment in the Ansley area of Atlanta. She would have Kate, her assistant, in the kitchen there cooking biscuits. They would bring in whatever had been cooked at the school. They would load it into her car, and it would be brought into Nathalie's kitchen. Then there would be a fabulous dinner party, and you would have Marcella Hazan and her husband there at the table and whatever. You might have Andrew Young. I mean, you had politicians, you had radio announcers. Nathalie's table became this most interesting place to be, because she was always pulling together, really, a cast of characters. It was a way for her to entertain her friends and these dignitaries from out of town, Julia and James Beard and whatever. It was a way for her to be hospitable to them. Maybe it was something—you think about it, Atlanta didn't have the restaurants then that it does now. It was like a lot of Southern cities in that, you know, it had a lot of folks—home—you cooked in the home, you went out to the country club, but you really didn't eat out at those downtown— you didn't eat at the downtown restaurants. Those were for tourists. How you entertained, you entertained people in the home. You really did. So, I think it was unique. I learned that there were a number of cooking schools like Rich's, like what Nathalie was doing across the country. Those women got together, I believe it was in the late [19]70s and started an organization called the International Association of Cooking School Teachers, which they changed to Culinary Professionals, IACP, now. It's still in existence. Those ladies still get together and see each other at the conference every year. It's phenomenal.

[01:00:58]

Annemarie N.: That's really cool. You mentioned later in our conversation, too, about these home cooking schools. Did you ever go and report on those, and can you talk about some of those experiences you had with those women?

[01:01:12]

Anne B.: Yeah. One of them was Dianne Wilkinson, and she lived on the north side of Atlanta. Her school was in her basement. It was amazing. It was like a bonus room. They didn't have any children, and they turned their basement into this open kitchen. There was sort of seating over here, but she could get probably thirty or forty chairs in there. It was a demonstration. So, she would have the chefs come in from France and demonstrate and cook, and she spoke some French. I remember that one really well. She did a really good job. Then there was Ursula. Hers was a business. She was on Cheshire Bridge Road, but she also lived in the cooking school, as well. Maybe she lived above it. I wish we could get back to those days, because it was a great way for the average person to take cooking classes and to learn how to make French food or how to do basic cooking, how to make a soup, how to make a stock. How to roast beef, how to . . . and they would have fabulous classes. And there were many more. But I guess Atlanta had—it was a large enough city, and there was enough interest in it that their classes stayed full, and they could do it.

[01:02:36]

Annemarie N.: That's really interesting.

[01:02:39]

Anne B.: Mm-hm.

[01:02:40]

Annemarie N.: I want to talk too, because you mentioned it, but I want to ask you exactly about your experiences. What were some of the things that you learned at La Varenne?

[01:02:48]

Anne B.: Well, La Varenne was an eye-opener. I went in thinking I didn't know that much, and so I applied for the—I believe it was the, not medium, what was it called? Course. There was beginning, intermediate. Intermediate. And I got in the intermediate, and I realized I knew everything. I went to the director, this was the first day, and I said, "I don't want you to think that I'm one of those people that thinks I know everything, but I really don't want to waste my time over here. I've gone to a whole lot of trouble to take a leave of absence and find a place to live and I really want to, I just really want to test myself while I'm here." She said, "You want to get in the advanced class?" I said "Yes, I do." So, she switched me to the advanced class, and it was tough, but I met some great friends. One of them was a young woman, really right out of college, younger than I was. She spoke fluent French. Her name was Margot. Then there was another woman named Laurie, who was director of Food and Beverage for Hyatt Hotels. She felt like, in her job, she did not know enough. And the three of us quickly formed a friendship. After class was over, we would, you know, go everywhere. We would go to the markets, we would go to the wine bars. We saw Paris by night, and it was so much fun. Margot was our translator. We were in good shape. But I think, from a culinary standpoint, I had had no training in fish. The

French . . . yeah, I knew nothing about the fish that swim off the coast of France, but I had to skin an eel. I had to skin an eel. So, I'll never forget that day with the chef. I think a lot of these French chefs, they're really macho, and they would do—they would kind of bring in a food that they knew was going to repulse the American students. [Laughter] She threw an eel, a large eel, on the table that was still quivering. We had to slit it all the way down. It was almost like taking something out of a wetsuit, taking off a wet bathing suit is what we had to do with this eel to get its skin off before we could slice it and eat it. That was pretty awful. Then I had to cook kidneys. All of the organ meats were a challenge for me. I really still don't love the organ meats. But that was challenging. You just kind of get through it. We all got through it. The pastry, I loved. I always thought that Southern cakes were more moist and more delicious than French cakes and they are. French cakes are very dry. It's just the method, they just don't have any fat in them. Then they're made, they're kept, it's a genoise batter, its different, and they're kept moist because they put a sugar syrup over it. So, that's how all these patisseries would keep their cakes moist and in the window, because they were pouring a load of sugar syrup all over it. They would seep into the cake and keep it moist. But the—I mean, the breads, the croissants. Making croissants was a life-changing event. Folding in all of the butter and learning how to fold it. I ended up, for a couple of years after I got back, I did make my own croissants. They were hard to duplicate, really, because our butter is different. I think our butter had more water in it than the French, and probably easier to make now that there are more European butters are available to the home cook, even the grocery store. So, you can probably make croissants today. But it was a wonder, it was an amazing experience and I enjoyed every minute of it. I was really urged to go to France and do

this by Nathalie Dupree. She really urged me. She said I had to get out of my comfort zone, and she was right. She was right.

[01:06:53]

Annemarie N.: That's awesome.

[01:06:55]

Anne B.: Mm-hm.

[01:06:55]

Annemarie N.: How did that experience of living in Paris for six months, and experiencing their food and their culture, and then getting all of this technical experience, how did that influence you as a journalist and as a food editor?

[01:07:09]

Anne B.: Well, I definitely came back more knowledgeable. I had a lot more confidence about the recipes that I chose and the recipes that I developed. I did start reviewing restaurants for Atlanta for about three years, because I felt like I had some credentials and I knew what I was talking about. So, that definitely affected me. But I think it was just, it opened my eyes to the rest of the world. Until then, I had only seen the South. I had only come from Nashville, I had only been in Atlanta. I had not experienced ingredients from another part of the world, and been able to compare them to my frame of reference. You know, to what I was raised on. It was—the older I get, the more I realize, we have more

in common than less in common, you know? I think a lot of the recipes are the same the world over, it's just the ingredients that are used that are slightly different, that change them.

[01:08:19]

Annemarie N.: That's really great. I had a question now, I just lost it.

[01:08:24]

Anne B.: That's all right.

[01:08:24]

Annemarie N.: What was I going to ask . . . ?

[01:08:30]

Anne B.: Living in Paris was fabulous. I mean, I was able to get an apartment through a woman who was a travel agent in Atlanta, Collette O'Brien was her name. She had dear friends in France, and they, these dear friends in France, had a daughter—had a lot of children—but one of their daughters had an apartment in Paris, right on Quai Voltaire, right on the Seine River, in the Seventh Arrondissement, which was around the corner from where my school was. This girl had been misbehaving. She had not been a good daughter, they said. They were going to punish her, and they were going to take her Paris apartment away from her for a specific amount of time. So, they get this call from Collette O'Brien saying, you know, I've got this Atlanta food writer and she wants to come to Paris for x

amount of time, and she's going to do some side trips, whatever. Do you know how we can find her an apartment? They said, “We have her an apartment.” So, probably the worst thing was, when I moved into Marie Laure's apartment, it was completely furnished. I felt a twinge of guilt. I felt sorry for the girl. She had, although, been sent to another home of theirs in Bordeaux, so I didn't feel that sorry for her. But some of her friends had not gotten word that she wasn't there. They would come and bang on the door at night or on a Friday or Saturday night and want her to come out, you know? And go out with them. I couldn't speak French as well as they could. I think that was the first challenge I had. They got used to it, I think they figured out that there was an American in Marie Laure's apartment. But just to be able, I think, to put yourself in a culture where you are not one hundred percent comfortable is good for everybody. The first day I arrived in Paris, my bags did not arrive, so I lived in the same set of clothes for three days. You know, you just . . . I was alone, and yet, when I went to school, I became part of a community. Those people became—and others felt the same way I did. We were all there together. We all needed each other and formed friendships, and we explored what Paris had to offer. It was just a great experience.

[01:10:57]

Annemarie N.: That's great. I remembered my question. What's the difference between writing restaurant reviews and writing something for the home cook?

[01:11:09]

Anne B.: Wow. Well, the restaurant reviews have to be not only entertaining, but they have to be really correct and factual. There's a fine line between being entertaining and providing this content, this weekend content, for your reader. At the same time, you're critiquing a life's work of an entrepreneur. That, finally, was my undoing, because I couldn't write any more negative reviews. I didn't think it was my job. [Clock Chimes] I wasn't put on this earth to destroy someone's business just by a couple of visits. I never liked that. I didn't like that responsibility. I liked the writing of it. I loved the exploration. I loved tasting new things before everybody else had. But I hated it when a restaurant wasn't good. I would oftentimes just not file the review, and then my editor would come over, I thought you were going to write about . . . yeah, I was going to write about that restaurant. Do I have to? You know. Can I put it in a roundup? Let me just come up with a theme like, seven great sandwiches to get in Atlanta, and maybe we can include one of their sandwiches in that roundup so I don't have to really critique them. So, that's how restaurant reviewing—it's tough, it's tough. It's inevitable that the restaurants and the chefs are going to be really mad at you. Writing recipes for the home cook is really much easier, as long as you get the recipe right and as long as it's been tested, and you explain it well. You're fine.

[01:13:10]

Annemarie N.: That's good. Is there anything else you want to talk about, about your career at the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*?

[01:13:18]

Anne B.: Excuse me. *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*? I don't think so.

[01:13:23]

Annemarie N.: I thought maybe we could talk about moving back to Nashville.

[01:13:27]

Anne B.: Sounds good.

[01:13:27]

Annemarie N.: And the column that you wrote for the *Tennessean*.

[01:13:30]

Anne B.: Mm-hm, sounds good.

[01:13:30]

Annemarie N.: So, you wrote the *Cake Mix Doctor*?

[01:13:34.01]

Anne B.: I did. People know me as the Cake Mix Doctor. [Laughter] I did leave Atlanta in [19]93. I married an old sweetheart and I moved to England for a year, and I wrote stories in England and actually was able to still sort of freelance some for the *A.J.C.* while I was there. But we ended up—my husband and myself—we moved to Nashville. I was, at first, not really thrilled about it because I thought, I don't want to go back to Nashville. The

food scene is not going to be as exciting. But as it turned out, it was a great move, because I was pregnant. It ended up being a great place to raise a family. My parents were getting older and they weren't well, I found out right after we got here. So, my responsibilities with my family really increased. My dad was sick, and then my mother developed breast cancer, Stage IV. It was really sad. So, I was juggling, looking after parents and having young children. But I missed the newspaper world. I missed writing. So, I wrote part-time for the *Tennessean*, which is the morning paper in Nashville. They had an opening; they wanted me to write, and we kind of had a deal that I could write as much as I want or as little as I wanted, and maybe a couple of big features a month. So, I did that. In June of [19]98, I wrote a story—right before we were going on vacation—and it was how you could take a box of cake mix and doctor it up with your favorite ingredients, and you create these amazing cakes. The headline was, “The Doctor Is In.” I wrote it because all those years I had spent in Atlanta, right? All the time I spent in France, writing about very highbrow food, I knew that the recipes for the average reader of the *Journal Constitution* liked the best were the cake mix recipes. I think it's something that all food writers knew. We didn't really talk about it. We didn't write about it. But we knew that they loved the rum cake, and they loved the apricot nectar cake, and whatever whatever, because it started with a cake mix. So, I wrote this story because I thought, well, I am back in Nashville and nobody cares. I can write about what I want to. I am not—[Laughter] I am not the gourmet from Atlanta anymore. I am raising a family. I'm in Nashville. I am going to write this story. And I included a little box at the beginning, "These are my favorites. What are yours? Bring 'em." And we went on vacation. A week later, I go back to the newspaper to check my mail, and there on this

desk is this box of letters that I have received. Again, we are pre e-mail, we are before e-mail. Fax machines were just coming into their own, and we had included a fax number in there. I got some faxed ones there, but I had five hundred recipes from across the state of Tennessee. It was really just the readership area of the *Tennesseean*. So, I wrote a few more stories out of it. I interviewed people, I went out in the field and interviewed ladies. I believe I got the banana cake that way, banana cake with caramel frosting was one of those, strawberry cake. I wrote about as much as I could write about it. Yet still, I got phone calls and letters from people, would you please write more cake mix recipes? So, at the time, I had contacted a woman in Chicago about being my literary agent. I had some book ideas in my head that were not food related, books that I thought I wanted to write. So I had found Nancy. She was sort of in a stage of life similar to mine, and I said, "Let's just keep in touch. I'll send you ideas." She said, "Sounds good." So I contacted her and I said, "I've got this idea for a book. I don't know whether it's going to resonate anywhere else but Nashville, but it is going crazy in Nashville, and these stories are starting to go out over the wire service, and somebody is going to jump on it. It's doctoring up a box of cake mix." She said, "Oh, wow, that's interesting." I said, "I tell you what. I'm going to call some of my friends coast to coast, and I'll call you back in a couple days and see what they say." So I called my friends in Seattle and Los Angeles and I called all my old food editor friends and I said, "I'm thinking about doing this book." They said "Oh, Anne, that would be wonderful, because if you did, then we could just tell people to buy your book and we don't have to keep searching for those recipes, because, you know, we know they love 'em." So I called my agent back and I said, "Nancy, I think it's a go. I think I can get you a proposal in a couple of days." She said,

"Sounds good." I wrote this proposal. We talked about it on the phone. She had a copy of the story that I had written, and she sent it to about five publishers. And we heard back from one. We got one yes, three rejections, but we hadn't heard from the fifth one, and it was the one that I thought—Workman—and it was the one that I thought would be perfect, because they tended to publish kinda quirky titles. And so, well, but we hadn't heard from the editor, which was really odd. So Nancy picks up the phone and calls the publisher, and says, "You know, this book is perfect for you all, but we're about to sell it to somebody else. But the author really wants me to call you because she thinks it's perfect for you." It was Peter Workman. He said, well, the editor, as it turned out, was on vacation. He went in and got the proposal off the editor's desk. He read it and he said, "We want this book." He said, "I get it." He said, "How quickly can she write it?" So, I chose Workman, and he said, "I want the book." This was maybe August. "I want the book by . . . November." It was insane. I had three months. So I wrote *The Cake Mix Doctor* in three months. I was younger, but my son, my youngest son, was in a high chair when I wrote it. Yeah, it was crazy. I tested recipes during the day, and then I wrote at night, and I made deadline. I was a little late. But it came out that next fall. All the photographs in the front, they had no photo budget. They got this woman who was, like, I think she was an intern there, who just said, "Oh, I know how to bake cakes." So, she took all of my recipes and she baked all of these cakes in her apartment, and they sent a photographer out to photograph them. A lot of them looked horrendous. I couldn't believe it. [Laughter] But you know, they published it this way with all of these little postage stamp pictures of all of the cakes with the page number, and to this day, the book is—it came out in [19]99, yeah, it's about seventeen, eighteen years old. They've never changed

the photography, it's still in print. [Laughter] They said they didn't want to change the photography, that's kind of made it so campy, you know? That's why I wrote *The Cake Mix Doctor*.

[01:20:55]

Annemarie N.: That's great. What was the response regionally and then nationally to the book?

[01:20:58]

Anne B.: Well, it was pretty crazy. I think they printed five thousand books, and I went on QVC, within two weeks after the book was out, I went on QVC, and I sold five thousand books in less than five minutes. So, the stock was gone, and I sold out. So they went back to press. I went on book tour, mostly in the South. People had heard about it, and I mean, that was . . . there was lines at bookstores to get in and get a copy. In Louisville, I was on television that morning. All the copies were sold by the time I got to the bookstore that night. It was crazy. My signing in Nashville, at the old Davis-Kidd, I mean, there must have been three hundred people there. It was packed. It was crazy. That was way before I got national attention. That was just regional. Then I went on about a fifteen-city tour, and was interviewed by a lot of food editor friends I knew. Some of them were very receptive to the book and were like, hallelujah, somebody has written this book. Others were much more snooty about it. They couldn't believe that I wrote a book all about cake mix. They could not believe it. When I went up to, like, St. Paul and Minneapolis area, the writer wanted me to have like a . . . sort of like a cake baking duel. She put me on one side of her kitchen baking my cake mix caramel cake. She was on the other side making

her scratch cake, and started a timer and see who was done first. That was pretty intimidating. It was her kitchen; she knew where everything was. But it was snowing outside, and I realized I could take my layers out of the oven and put 'em right into the snow to speed cool them. [Laughter] So then I started making the caramel frosting—as my cakes came out of the oven, I was making the caramel frosting, and then I brought the cakes in. They were still kind of a little warm, but cool enough to frost, which was perfect for the caramel icing. You want 'em the same temperature. And I beat her. I won. So it was a little intimidating. The real break on *The Cake Mix Doctor* was about a year after it was published. Linda Wertheimer from *All Things Considered*, NPR, was in Florida visiting her mother in St. Petersburg, Florida. She was in the airport and she was just sitting in the airport waiting on her flight, and she looked down and there was a copy of the *St. Pete Times*, and I had just been interviewed by the *St. Pete Times*. There was this story on this woman from Nashville who has written this book all about how you can doctor up cake mix, and how it's going crazy and it's selling out of book stores, whatever. So she brings this story back with her to D.C. and gives it to her booker, assistant, said, "Find this woman in Nashville." So I get a telephone call, I think in my home, through my publisher and said, "Can you be at our local affiliate tomorrow afternoon to be on with Linda Wertheimer?" I was like, can I? [Laughter] And that was it, that was the biggest break. Once I was on *All Things Considered*, the *Washington Post* called me for an interview, and then the *New York Times* called and wanted me to fly to New York and come up. I went up there and I baked a banana cake in Alex Witchel's kitchen. She wanted me to bake a cake that would be nostalgic for her, and she remembered the old Sara Lee banana cakes that were frozen, that had like a cream cheese frosting, and I said,

"I got the cake." So, I baked the cake. I got up there. She didn't have a mixer. She told me that ahead of time, actually, so . . . I got permission to buy a new KitchenAid hand mixer. Crazy, baking this cake in her kitchen. Then I was in the *New York Times*. Then *People* magazine called and then they came to the house and got a picture of me on my counter with all these—it was crazy. So, it was a really busy time. It became a national, yeah . . . it sold. This book alone has sold about two million copies. It's crazy.

[01:25:21]

Annemarie N.: That's insane.

[01:25:21]

Anne B.: It's insane. Yeah. So I think it was a mixed reaction. I think some people got it. Women who had been writing about food for years and had done what I did, they completely got it. I didn't really write this book for me. I wrote this book for the reader, and that's what I think a lot of people got, and some people didn't get. It wasn't that I was saying, this is the way to bake. I was saying, I know there are a lot of you out there who want to bake but don't have the time. Or, you think you don't have the skills, and you just want to start with a cake mix. Don't just make that cake mix by the box directions. I'm going to tell you some things to do, and I'm going to show you how to make homemade frosting. So it was a way of kind of getting in—because that was what was, it was actually something my mother had done as a cheat. She would say, you know, you can always get away with a cake mix cake if you make your own frosting. [Laughter] My

mother had the best frosting, so that's what became the frostings of the cake mix doctor, were her recipes.

[01:26:17]

Annemarie N.: That tension is a really interesting tension, like between what you realize as a mother and also as somebody who's really interacted with a lot of people, and also being someone who's well-trained as a cook, and who is in this kind of, like, food writing circle. How did you feel about being, and how do you feel about being called the Cake Mix Doctor?

[01:26:46]

Anne B.: I'm fine with it, because it is definitely my name. I'm fine with it. But then I write other books, and I research the history of American cake, *American Cake*, and the sales department will continue to say, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Cake Mix Doctor*. And I understand, from a sales perspective, why they want to do that. It's been a little bit of a hurdle for some food writers, and the public, to understand that I could actually have a backstory, and I could actually have training, and I could actually have been doing something completely different than this for a chunk of my life. But I don't really care. I've always been sort of an outlier. I've always done what I wanted to do and shake things up a little differently. So who else but me to write *The Cake Mix Doctor*? [Laughter] Who else was going to write it? I mean, yeah. I had the right skill set.

[01:27:43]

Annemarie N.: That's great. Can we talk a little bit about the books that are a little more historically-based?

[01:27:48]

Anne B.: Definitely.

[01:27:49]

Annemarie N.: Let's talk about *American Cake* and *American Bites*.

[01:27:53]

Anne B.: Yes, yes. Actually, *American Bites* has just been renamed *American Cookie*. [Laughter] That's only as of a couple of days ago, so. *American Cake* and *American Cookie*, yeah.

[01:28:05]

Annemarie N.: Can you talk a little bit about the process of writing that? How it's different than kind of writing a cookbook that's more original?

[01:28:14]

Anne B.: Yes, yes. *American Cake* is the history of cake in our country. I came up with this idea maybe five or six years ago because, again, it was a book that nobody had written. And I wondered about the story behind all of those cake recipes I had shared in *The Cake Mix Doctor* and shared in the newspapers, hummingbird cake, red velvet cake, darn good

chocolate cake, just a lot of cakes that are popular. I wondered, just outside of my area, outside of my region, there were probably many more cakes. So I started listing what I considered the one hundred most important cakes in America. And actually went back and interviewed my food editor friends, what do you think, in your area of the country, are the most important cakes? I just researched the history of them, and I found that it was pretty interesting. Got the agent back involved; found a publisher. The process for writing a book that is historical is that you not only have recipe development, but you have research, and you have the interview process. You've got to be able to, in the end, weave all of that together. You've got to be able to work on all that sort of simultaneously. I didn't realize that until I was researching and interviewing for *American Cake,* and interviewed a woman in Virginia, Leni Sorensen, who had studied all of the Mary Randolph, the Virginia Housewife recipes, and knew those quite well. She's an African American woman in Virginia, she's taught cooking for a long time. I was really calling her to interview her about Mary Randolph recipes, and what and how Virginia cooking would have been in the early 1800s when the Virginia Housewife was published. Then we got off on a conversation talking about the core ingredients of cake which, as you know, flour, butter, sugar, and eggs, and how these ingredients would have impacted the cakes, early cakes. Then she started explaining to me the history of sugar, and who could afford sugar and who could not afford sugar. After that interview, I realized that *American Cake* was going to take a different path. It wasn't so much a collection of recipes with the history as it was using a hundred recipes to look at history, and what can a cook—yes, you want to see a red velvet cake, but what does the red velvet cake tell us about the 1930s? Why would someone have used that much red food coloring in a cake?

Why would you have done that? It was asking a lot of the questions that I had been trained as a journalist to ask, the who, what, when, where, and why about a recipe. It was fascinating, absolutely fascinating. I wrote the book chronologically; I started with the earliest cakes, being the cakes of the colonies, and then moving on to present-day time. I was a little worried about present-day time because I think after you go through the early 1900s with all the Lady Baltimore and these gorgeous ten-layer cakes and fillings, you think, how will American cake ever, ever equal that? But what happened is that American cakes would have came back to reality, and the cakes that we have today are much more stodgy. They're much more earthy. They don't have to be baked in a certain size pan. They can be baked with different flours. They probably are baked with different flours; a lot of people are gluten free. There's just a much more of an interchange in the recipes that are being used today, and that's very similar to the early cakes in our country. It's fascinating.

[01:32:14]

Annemarie N.: Definitely. What's the difficulty of trying to recipe test and develop recipes now for cakes that were—

[01:32:21]

Anne B.: Made then? Well, you've got to look at the ingredients. Say, for example, there's a carrot tea cake—here it is, I actually turned to it. The Fraunces Tavern Carrot Tea Cake, that supposedly was linked to George Washington because it was served at the Fraunces Tavern in New York City, and it was when the British troops finally left New York, and

George Washington did his famous gallop down the . . . on his horse, and went straight into the Fraunces Tavern, which you can still go in to this day, and was served a grand meal of celebration, and lots of toasting. This cake has been written about. But the cake—it had appeared in the *New York Times*, it appeared in a cookbook or two, but it had ingredients like vegetable oil and maybe some leavening that would never have been in a cake from 1783. So what I chose to do was to research the history of the cake, and then to bring this cake back to 1783. So I got rid of the leavening. It's a pound cake. It's a pound cake, so the leavening, the lightness in the cake, comes from the creaming of the butter and the sugar and adding the eggs one at a time. Then I went back to butter. So really, the only ingredients in here are butter, sugar, eggs, flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, and a little bit of salt. But this is a lovely cake, because it shows how early cakes did not have a frosting. The use of sugar would have been okay, because this was a celebratory cake. It was a cake for an important, you know, it was the president. Then the use of cinnamon and nutmeg, same thing. The use of spices in early American baking, spices were available, but they tended to be for people who had the means to afford them. Nutmeg was a favorite space of the old—I think challenging with older recipes were the eggs. Butter is butter, pretty much. Most of the butter that's used was salted then, but the salt was washed off the butter before it was used for baking. The flour that I used in the early American recipes in testing was unbleached, but the eggs were always an issue. If it was an old recipe, I went by weight, and because four eggs, old recipe, probably was more like two eggs today, back when eggs were an ounce apiece. Today, eggs are two ounces each. So I think that's something that can throw off an old pound cake recipe, whatever. You kind of have to go back and use a scale, if you're going to bake those. So that was—

you know. Then, I think, the size of the pans was a little bit of a challenge. I had to look at the Martha Washington great cake, really was a great big cake, and I had to take it down so someone could make it in one loaf. It's currants and the currants are soaked in wine, it's really a lovely cake. And there was some early leavenings, like saleratus, pearl ash. I just used the equivalent for those; I would use baking soda on those for that. But that was really, I think, the only real challenge. Then probably, I think too, figuring out that the ovens and the wood-fired ovens in which these early cakes were baked would have been a completely different way of baking. So what I had to do was focus on the modern cook and just get it to work. Realize the story, tell the story, and then make it work in today's oven.

[01:36:07]

Annemarie N.: That's really cool, and a lot of work.

[01:36:11]

Anne B.: It was a lot of work. It was about, it was almost three years' work.

[01:36:15]

Annemarie N.: Wow, that's a lot.

[01:36:15]

Anne B.: But I really enjoyed it, and it changed the way—it just definitely changed the way that I look at food. Now, I feel like I can't look at a recipe without understanding where it

comes from, and by looking at the ingredients, I could probably tell you, you know, where it came from, which is . . . which is really, it's a good thing. There's actually a chapter in here on how to learn from old recipes, what they tell you. The icebox cakes, you know, the cakes that were put in the refrigerator of the 1930s were put there because people want it to be at the ready, they wanted to be—more women were working in the workforce after the Depression, and you had to be ready. You couldn't be making a seven minute frosting and frosting a seven layer cake. You had to be economical and you had to be prepared. It's really, really interesting. I loved the regional, a lot of the regional cakes I had not been raised on. The syrup cakes from Louisiana, I didn't know about the date industry in California and how the first date palm trees were brought over from Middle East to be planted in California as an agricultural crop. It was really, it was super interesting. And the Amish influence on cakes. Back to newspapers, how many of these old recipes came out of newspapers, but came out of cooking schools that newspapers used to hold, or the gas company would have, or the baking powder brochure. People didn't buy cookbooks. They accumulated recipes from trusted sources, which was usually the range company, the gas and light company, the baking powder company, the newspaper food editor. Those were the recipes they kept. It's interesting.

[01:38:15]

Annemarie N.: That is really interesting. Can you talk too about your *Cooking in the New South*?

[01:38:20]

Anne B.: *Cooking in the New South* was the first book that I wrote. I wrote it, I think it was [19]94. It was published by Peachtree Publishers, and the publisher was a former editor of mine at the *Journal Constitution*, Chuck Perry. He said, "You know, have you ever thought about writing a book?" I was pretty young then. I said, "I haven't, but that's a great idea." So I just assembled my favorite Southern recipes. It was the worst-edited book. Everything's in the wrong order. There's some great recipes in here, but good Lord knows, it was pretty poorly done. Pies mixed up with cakes and it's a mess. But, there's some great recipes in here. And it set me going. The next book I wrote for Peachtree was a little bit later. It was in the [19]90s, I think it was [19]96, called *Food Gifts for All Seasons*. This one was actually nominated for a Julia Child Award, and I did this in collaboration with an Atlanta artist named Anne Hathaway. So she did all the illustrations. I loved her illustrations. But these were recipes that you would take as a food gift for someone. I did it by the seasons, spring, summer, fall, and winter, and I wrote this book after we had moved to Nashville. And my parents had been sick. I realized how important food gifts were to people when times are not going great, and how my parents had such longtime friendships and relationships and the food just kept pouring in. I think, after spending that much time in a big city like Atlanta, to come back to a smaller place where you grew up and then you realize that all of these people remember you, they know you, they know your family, and when things are not going great, there's something very comforting. So that's what I wanted to capture in a book, was why people give food gifts, and what are some really great things to bring to other people. So those both were written before *The Cake Mix Doctor*, and then *The Cake Mix*

Doctor came out and then I wrote all the others, *What Can I Bring*, *The Dinner Doctor*, yeah. Yeah.

[01:40:32]

Annemarie N.: What was it like? How did you kind of translate your ability as a journalist into this marketing force? Because I think you really used your talents in a way that, like, really created kind of like a small, I don't want to say empire, but you created like a name for yourself doing this specific thing.

[01:40:53]

Anne B.: Right. Well, I have to credit Workman Publishers. They did a great job in marketing me. I went on television with no television experience. I think that's back to what we talked about; sometimes you just have to put yourself out there and just do it. It was not horrible. It got better as I went on. I had no media training, but I developed just my own way of doing television that I felt comfortable with, which is I would always look at the host if I got nervous about looking at the camera that was pointed toward me. I would always fix my eyes on the host, and that's what they wanted you to do anyway. They don't really want you looking over at the camera and smiling and waving. They want you to focus on their host. So, that made it pretty good. [Clock Chimes] Also, I just followed their lead. I knew that I had to create, in a couple of quick words, things that I had to get across in less than ten minutes. As long as I could get that across in less than two minutes, if I had three minutes, five minutes, six minutes, whatever, then I had plenty of time for a conversation. But once I sensed that they were about to wrap up, I knew that I

had to get it across where my book signing was that night or where people can go for more information, that kind of thing. So I don't know. I spent a lot of time on the road. Workman sent me on a lot of book tours, and I spent a lot of time away from my family. But I have a great husband, and he was able to hold the fort down. And I got great kids. So, they learned to be very self-sufficient, I think. My daughters really learned to cook because they said they were so sick of Daddy's cooking that they learned to cook. [Laughter] I mean finally, they would text me or whatever saying, When are you coming home? You know? We're so tired of the way he . . . opens up cans and pours it into a pot. But I shouldn't say that. But I think they just started liking to cook, and I think they were proud of me, too, and kind of became part of a, kind of became a family thing.

[01:42:57]

Annemarie N.: That's great. Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't talked about that you think is important?

[01:43:02]

Anne B.: Well, I think I'll add that I am not unlike other newspaper food writers and editors in that we develop skill sets that can be transferable to other careers. I think a lot of us, I left the newspaper business by choice, but had I been there a few more years, I probably would have had to leave as well, because the newspapers started laying off long-timers or closing. So I think, as the industry changed—stopped—there were a lot of people, and are a lot of people, who have a lot of skills in recipe development and working with consumers that had to get creative and had to figure out, how can I earn a paycheck?

What am I going to do with it? Cookbooks are an obvious outlet, and yet, cookbooks are a very difficult way to make money. You get paid on an advance, but that advance is over a long period of time. It's really hard to gain a real income on cookbooks. So I think it's just a constant challenge for food writers today and for former newspaper food writers to stay employed. Back in, I look back at the history of Henrietta Dull—and I have researched the history of her for the *Bitter Southerner*—she had a lot of gigs going on. She wasn't just the food editor for the *Atlanta Journal*, but she was doing some writing and some consulting for some companies. She had her fingers in lots of different pots, and it was just expected that people did that. It's just interesting. It's definitely a way of life, and some wonderful memories, yeah, of a really great time in our history. Thank you.

[01:45:11]

Annemarie N.: Thank you. I appreciate it.

[*End of interview*]