Sarah Fritschner
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Annemarie Anderson: Good afternoon. Today is Friday, June 22. We are in Lexington, Kentucky, interviewing Ms. Sarah Fritschner, and I am Annemarie Nichols.

Let's start off, would you introduce yourself for the recorder and then give us your date of birth, please?

[0:00:18.1]

Sarah Fritschner: My name is Sarah Fritschner, and I was born 11/14/54.

[0:00:23.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Great. Can you tell me a little bit about your early life? Where are you from?

[0:00:27.3]

Sarah Fritschner: I'm from Louisville. I was born in Louisville to a post-World War II couple. I was the fourth of four, three older brothers. I just grew up in a brand-new post-war suburb of Louisville and left Louisville, you know, moved away to work at newspapers and kind of get experience other places, and then moved back to work in another newspaper, but wanted to come back home. I love Louisville. A lot of people in Louisville move back to Louisville.

[0:01:06.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Were your parents from Louisville originally?

[0:01:08.7]

Sarah Fritschner: Both were from Louisville originally. My mom's family came from up east, and my dad's family were German immigrants, but he wasn't, like, first generation. His mother I'm not sure was first generation. They'd been in Louisville since the mid-1800s. So, yeah.

[0:01:33.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. And were there any, like, food—any special food traditions that you guys had growing up?

[0:01:39.0]

Sarah Fritschner: You know, that's why I feel like such a fraud here.

[0:01:42.3]

Annemarie Anderson: No! [Laughter]

[0:01:42.7]

Sarah Fritschner: I'm just so embarrassed to be in this position, because my mom was not a great cook, my grandmothers weren't great cooks. My mom's mom was actually a suffragette, you know, was very ahead of her time. But, yeah, there were no—you know, my mom, as soon as I learned to bake, my mom had me bake everyone's birthday cakes, with a mix, because she didn't want to bake, and she wasn't a great cook, didn't know much about food. She did weird things. She would cook us all artichokes, so I grew up

knowing what an artichoke was, and loving them, but I mean, I have scores of stories about how horrible our food was. So, no, we didn't really grow up with a lot of traditions.

[0:02:38.4]

Annemarie Anderson: What was your mother's name?

[0:02:39.6]

Sarah Fritschner: Betty. Betty Jones. And her brother's name was Dick Jones. So, yeah.

[0:02:47.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Could you tell me about your grandmother as a suffragette? Because that's an interesting story.

[0:02:51.8]

Sarah Fritschner: Well, I don't know too much. My brother should be here to tell you. But she was very blue-blood. She came from a long line of—I think one of her great-uncles signed the Declaration of Independence, I think. She went to college. Do you know where Katherine Hepburn went to college? I don't think it was Vassar, but it could've been. I'll text my brother. And she was just into women's rights. I think she was also gay, so, yeah. So her husband died when my mom was two, I believe, and from that day on, she lived with another woman. That's all I sort of know.

[0:03:47.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's really interesting.

[0:03:47.3]

Sarah Fritschner: I know.

[0:03:49.0]

Annemarie Anderson: So you grew up in Lexington—grew up in Louisville. Sorry, I have Lexington on my mind.

[0:03:54.1]

Sarah Fritschner: Yes.

[0:03:56.0]

Annemarie Anderson: So you grew up in Louisville, and then you went to University of Kentucky?

[0:03:59.4]

Sarah Fritschner: I did. I went to a small liberal arts school in Ohio for just brief—you know, like a quarter, and then I was homesick, really, is basically what it turned out to be. I'm sure if I'd stayed there, I would've been fine, but I thought I'd come to the land grant university and major in nutrition, is what I was thinking, and that's what I ended up doing.

Hold on. [Texting her Brother]

[0:04:27.5]

Annemarie Anderson: You're fine. [Laughter]

[0:04:41.6]

Sarah Fritschner: Okay. Sorry.

[0:04:45.5]

Annemarie Anderson: So why'd you decide to major in nutrition?

[0:04:47.6]

Sarah Fritschner: Because when I was little, I loved to cook. I loved to bake. Now I couldn't bake my way out of a paper bag, but I loved to bake when I was a kid, and I loved horses and I loved baking, so I thought, you know, I couldn't afford to major in horses, whatever that would be, so I kind of had came at it from this sort of puritanical need to be useful, you know, sort of like I have to go to college for a certain thing. I wasn't raised to think I needed to better my mind. I was raised to think how will I go on with this college education. So liberal arts was not necessarily of value. I mean, my parents, they weren't slave drivers, but it was just I grew up thinking—[phone rings] Wellesley. She went to Wellesley. [Phone rings. Reading her brother's text message] And my grandfather, who died when my mother was young, went to Princeton.

[0:05:57.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Oh, wow. They were very educated people.

[0:06:02.5]

Sarah Fritschner: Yes, and brilliant. My uncle was brilliant. I think my mom might've been brilliant, too, but she didn't finish college and she didn't do anything specifically that would make her brilliant, I mean make it apparent that she was brilliant.

I don't know where I was.

[0:06:28.1]

Annemarie Anderson: We were talking about majoring in nutrition and that decision.

[0:06:32.8]

Sarah Fritschner: Yeah. So I guess I just majored in nutrition because—well, I remember reading something in the newspaper once about—I became fascinated to think that degenerative diseases—sorry, that nutrition-related diseases were so modifiable or you could intervene so easily. Sort of to sum it up in a little simplistic idea, I sort of thought you could cure blindness by helping people learn to eat carrots. I mean, that's kind of the way it was. That's kind of what I was thinking. So if I learned more about nutrition, I could help people live a better life. That's what I went into it thinking, and that's why I got a nutrition degree.

[0:07:42.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Could you talk a little bit about any professors or mentors that you had there who impacted you?

[0:07:48.2]

Sarah Fritschner: I'm just telling you I am an incredibly boring person. [Laughter] I'm not a good storyteller.

[0:07:57.7]

Annemarie Anderson: No!

[0:07:59.2]

Sarah Fritschner: It was a pretty—I had professors I enjoyed. One of them got fired because he wasn't publishing enough, you know, but we all loved him. But, yeah, no, I don't remember any of my professors being—none of my nutrition food people being super—they were good, they were fine, but it was not there that I found any kind of thought leadership, if that makes sense.

[0:08:36.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. So you went there because—you majored in nutrition because you had this kind of like goal and idea that you wanted to better others' lives.

[0:08:45.9]

Sarah Fritschner: Through food, because I had a relationship with—my own personal relationship with food.

[0:08:50.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Did you find that goal to be applicable? Or how did you realize that goal through your time at UK in the nutrition department?

[0:09:02.8]

Sarah Fritschner: I think at UK, I think my college years were spent churning out what I needed to churn out in order to graduate. I think my whole life was waiting to get out of school and go work, to be a worker, so I wasn't inspirational in school and I wasn't inspired in school, and that was no one's fault but my own, you know. It was just I wasn't mature enough or, you know, I played a lot of spades in the cafeteria and I, you know, went out and got loaded on Friday nights, you know, just did—I was just basically an overwhelming underachiever, you know. I just didn't do anything much. I got good-enough grades, nothing special at all. [Laughter] Very big disappointment to everyone.

[0:10:00.5]

Annemarie Anderson: I don't believe that.

[0:10:02.5]

Sarah Fritschner: [Laughter] Well, it was not a glorious college career.

[0:10:07.6]

Annemarie Anderson: So how did you get an interest—how did you start getting interested in writing and how does that connect with your nutrition—

[0:10:13.9]

Sarah Fritschner: I think I had a talent for writing. I took journalism for non-majors in college. I didn't take any writing courses other than whatever was basic, and most of my—you know, most of the support classes were biochemistry and organic chemistry, you know, that kind of stuff, so I wasn't really writing. What happened was, when I sort of graduated—I didn't graduate. I had six more hours of classes I needed, but I left college after four years and I just got a basic job at the newspaper in Louisville, the *Louisville Times*, which was the evening newspaper at the time. I was a clerk, you know, again underachieving beyond anyone's expectations, and I ended up filling in for the food editor when she would go out of town or something. You know, they'd have me write a few things or somebody would ask me to do something, and I would write about whatever, lettuce prices.

My senior paper had been on wheat germ, something about wheat germ. I can't even remember. So I invented a bread that had sweet potatoes in it and was whole wheat and had wheat germ, and there was some science about the wheat germ and how some of the enzymes in wheat germ would interfere with the rising of the bread or something. I can't really remember, but anyway, I invented this recipe we called Super Bread because it had all this Vitamin A in it and, you know, whole wheat flour, which at the time, it was in the early, mid-[19]70s, so whole wheat flour was still new. And they ran it in kind of a

weekend section and gave it a whole—it was a tab section, and they gave it a whole page of art, which made it, like, look amazing. And so that was pretty fun.

And so I just ended up starting to get clips together, kind of by mistake. Every time the food editor would leave, I would write something to fill in. So I got a portfolio, and then I just started—you know, *Editor & Publisher* was a magazine for the profession at the time, and they would advertise classified ads in the back, and my mom got—she worked in the building. She wasn't a journalist, but she would get copies of it and hand it to me, and I would go through the classifieds and send off my clips, you know, and got a job and got another job, and then came home.

[0:13:17.4]

Annemarie Anderson: So after you were at the *Louisville Times*, where did you go?

[0:13:20.9]

Sarah Fritschner: I went to the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, and that was also a family-owned paper, much smaller than the *Courier* and *Times*, but the family had a very strong food point of view. They wanted a good food section, and they offered me the job and it was paying the same amount as my clerk's job, I remember that. I was like, "That's how much I'm making now."

And they went, "Yeah, but when you leave here, you can go to the *St. Petersburg Times* or the *Miami Herald*. There's so many good newspapers in Florida."

I was like, "Okay."

So I left and went to the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, where, you know, you're the whole food section. I wrote my own headlines, I sized my own pictures. You know, you just do it all and write photo assignments, I mean, all the things you have to learn to do to be a newspaper food editor, and made really good friends and hated every minute of it because I was dragged out of the womb of my childhood home, and just had to learn to grow there.

And then, again, developed a portfolio and was approached by the *Florida Times-Union* in Jacksonville, just a few miles north, and loved Jacksonville, A, because it wasn't the first place I'd lived after I left home [Laughter], but because, B, there was a river. It was a river town, and even though in Louisville another state is across the river, that's not the case in Jacksonville, but you did go across the river. You know, it just reminded me a lot of Louisville. The places on either side of the bridge were like the places in Louisville that I had grown up around. I just also made some really good friends there and had a really good time in Jacksonville, again wrote all my own headlines, but I had a copy editor who helped me there, it was a *huge* food section. I guess print was in its prime or something then. It was just a *huge* section.

Then I was approached by the *Washington Post*, and I didn't want to move. I loved my job in Jacksonville, but everybody was kind of saying, "What? You're not going to the *Post*?" And so I ended up going to the *Washington Post* and being the person who kind of—the boss who hired me was the restaurant critic, and so I ended up being the person that did more political and nutrition-related things, and she did restaurant openings, which fit my personality fine. I hate restaurant openings and being on the

cutting—I'm not on the cutting edge. I'd never be on the cutting edge, so I was glad to not have responsibility for that.

And then I moved home. My mom got cancer, was diagnosed with cancer, and I came home to visit her when she was going in for a biopsy or whatever it was, and talked to the people at the newspaper then. She ended up living many years and being fine. Anyway, so that's how I got back to Louisville.

[0:17:01.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. So I want to talk a little bit about your early jobs, So in Daytona and in Jacksonville, what were some of the most important lessons that you learned in your early career as a food editor?

[0:17:17.3]

Sarah Fritschner: I just learned really the craft of reporting and writing for a newspaper, which at least in the world that I lived in, they wanted people stories. They wanted you to be in the community and reflect the community. And so it would be rare that I would write a story about eggs or muffins, you know. What they wanted was for me to go into the community and report about someone's experience at a cooking school or someone's—it was really a wonderful learning curve for me, because, first of all, when I got there, a bunch of books—so I was going to review books that year for the whatever, Christmas section or whatever, and a bunch of really good books came out that year, one of which was a Marcella Hazan book, and I don't know if it was the first one or the second one, but it was one of the classic Italian cooking books. But there were a bunch

that year that came out, that were like that, like *Classic Italian Cooking*. It was maybe not a Julia Child book that year, but just a bunch of seminal works, you know.

So I was reading all this stuff that was the absolute first time it had been written down and, arguably, best time, you know. I mean, so that was amazing, and at the same time, interviewing people who had their own stories to tell, and I just remember all these people. So I did a story on sushi in—it might've been 1979. I made sushi in 1979. I interviewed a woman who was married to someone who was in some military—I don't remember which, but they had lived in Japan and she had learned to make sushi, and she taught me how to make sushi, and I wrote about sushi. Looking back, I mean, I did—you know. And then sushi disappeared, but I got to do that with her.

And I remember interviewing an Italian family about the Christmas Eve service with all the fish. I lived in Daytona, and it was all this—the fish banquet that they have on Christmas Eve, you know, which is just the stereotypical Italian feast story, almost, and they did it. Every Christmas Eve, they had this big fish banquet.

And I interviewed a Cuban, a woman who—she wasn't Cuban, but she was married to a Cuban, you know, the quintessential dishes that that's what she made for her husband because that's what her mother-in-law—that's the recipe her mother-in-law gave her.

And so I was just learning all this really basic foundational information about cuisines of all kinds and techniques, you know. There was a French chef in town, you know. You just learn about cooking. My mom had been a horrible cook, and I learned—I didn't like anything. I mean, asparagus at our house was canned asparagus. I mean, the

food was just awful. So I just learned how to cook well through all these people. So, yeah, I was blessed.

[0:21:35.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:21:36.0]

Sarah Fritschner: Yeah. So that's what I learned, just kind of how to go into the community and bring stories back. That's what I really feel like I learned as a food editor.

[0:21:50.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's awesome. What was that transition like from Daytona, which is smaller, and Jacksonville, which is kind of like a regional center but still not as big as D.C.?

[0:21:59.4]

Sarah Fritschner: Right.

[0:21:59.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Going to a national newspaper, what's that transition like, or what was it like for you?

[0:22:04.4]

Sarah Fritschner: Well, you know, D.C. was just completely different. It was really rigorous and hard. You know, you work constantly. I mean, everybody in D.C.'s a lawyer and it's all about billable hours and everybody works, you know, sixteen hours a day and burns the candle at both ends, and I just was doing that, and it was really hard, and I never did anything unless someone came to town. If my mother came to town, we'd go to the Smithsonian, but I never went to the Smithsonian on my own. I didn't have time.

But I ran. I was a runner, and running all over D.C. was just such a—it's the best place in the world to run. You know, Lady Bird Johnson planted daffodils *everywhere*, and you could run down— they have paths everywhere, and you would just run through these long, twisty, you know, along the river, along the Potomac, and, you know, it was just gorgeous. Or you'd run out the towpath. I mean, you could run to West Virginia if you wanted to, and you could run to Mt. Vernon and back. I think it's a beautiful city. I don't know if anyone would agree with me, but I think it's a beautiful city.

[0:23:33.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:23:34.6]

Sarah Fritschner: Yeah.

[0:23:35.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Can you tell me a little bit, too, about what was your relationship with your colleagues there at the *Post*? Was there, like—what kind of relationship did you all develop?

[0:23:47.1]

Sarah Fritschner: Collegial, but intense. I mean, everybody was just intensely focused on their careers, so it was really—and my roommates, one worked at *National Geographic* and one worked at *USA Today*, and I remember thinking, when I was thinking about coming back to Louisville, I remember thinking, you know, if I got a flat tire on the Beltway, there'd be no one I could call because everyone is too busy to leave. Like in Louisville, you'd call a friend, but you couldn't do that in D.C. because they would all—you know, it's too hard to get back to your car, it's too hard to, you know—I guess I didn't think about AAA or something at the time, and all I could think about was being stranded on the Beltway.

But, yeah, it was hard. It was hard. I mean, like, I lived with two women and they were great friends, one of whom, the one who worked at *USA Today*, I'd worked with in Jacksonville, and she came up and worked at *USA Today*, so I had a lot of good friends there, but everybody was really focused on their careers. I mean, I remember sitting in back of a man whose name I'm not going to be able to recall right now, but he wrote a book at night. He was in the features section, and he went home every night and wrote a book, and it was published while I was there, and I remember him feeling bad because, you know, it didn't get the kind of reviews that a Tom Wolfe or a, you know, whoever else from the *Washington Post* got, and so he didn't feel good about himself, yet he'd

written a book and gotten it published. So it's just a lot of pressure. People were just under a lot of pressure, and I felt like I was under a lot of pressure. So that was probably self-imposed also, but it's a pretty high-pressure work, and I was not sorry to leave. I probably should've been, but I wasn't. I was glad to get back to Louisville.

[0:26:07.6]

Annemarie Anderson: I don't blame you. What were some responsibilities as associate food editor there that you had to do? That was required of your job?

[0:26:15.6]

Sarah Fritschner: Gosh, I don't remember. Interviewing people and writing stories and being absolutely flawlessly, precisely right, correct, which you have to be anywhere in a newspaper, but everybody's looking for the second and third meaning when they read the *Post*, and, like, I wrote a story about a man who did research on—I think it was one of the B vitamins. You know, Beltsville, Maryland, is just full of all these researchers that research nutrition. I just thought it was a candy store. I can't even remember what the story was about or why I had written it, but it ran on the third page of the section, and he sent me a note—because I think it was pre—I'm sure it was pre-computer email—that said he understood that it wasn't as sexy as a lot of other stories, and that's why it ran on the third page of the *Washington Post*! And I was like, "Golly, that's sensitive, don't you think?" So, you know, everybody's looking at the *Post* for—I do. I mean, I do now.

But it was a lot of responsibility, which was fine, because a lot of times I'm just interviewing—oh, Mo Siegel, who invented Celestial Seasonings Tea, came to town, and

I interviewed him. He wanted to talk about just about anything but Celestial Seasonings Tea. [Laughter] He was hilarious.

And, you know, I interviewed a guy, I guess he was from D.C., who won the Ironman Competition in Hawaii, and I interviewed—oh, what was her name? An actress. She was on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and I can't think of it. Valerie. I can't remember her last name. Anyway, she returned my call. And Julia Child returned my call. So that was pretty fun. And, you know, people who read the *Post* expect to see that, so I was glad to do it. But, basically, I guess my responsibility—I wasn't writing headlines. I wasn't sizing pictures anymore. I'm sure I was making photo assignments, you know, testing all the recipes. We'd always done that. Yeah, providing, you know, whatever. Going to things, speaking, you know, the usual.

[0:29:32.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. Could you talk a little bit about your—do you have anything else you want to add about working with the *Washington Post*?

[0:29:38.7]

Sarah Fritschner: No, no.

[0:29:41.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about the transition from going from such an intense working environment to the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and what that transition was like?

[0:29:51.5]

Sarah Fritschner: Well, I didn't have to buy pantyhose anymore. I called my girlfriend at the *Post* at the time. She and her husband—she worked at the *Post*, and I can't remember where he worked, but she said—she would always—not always, but often she would wait until he left for work and then she would bring the car into the city and pay to park it, and they were saving for a house, so that was a big no-no. So she would, like, sneak it. So I called her and I said, "Karen, guess how much I'm paying to park?"

And she said, "How much?"

And I said, "Twelve dollars a month."

And she said, "Oh, my god, Sarah, you're going to be rich!"

And I thought, "Yeah, I'm going to be rich." So anyway, it was very—you know, the cost of living was extremely different, and the ease of getting around, you know, was—you know, I probably gained nine hours a week just in commuting time.

[0:31:03.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's crazy.

[0:31:05.1]

Sarah Fritschner: So, yeah, that was crazy. And I was a little bored at first, but then just got busy, and then a lot of the chores came back. You know, I worked directly with the art department, which I hadn't done in Washington, because I was the assistant food editor, so I didn't really—it was just a title. I didn't really, you know, make decisions

other than what I was doing. So, you know, I'd go to the art department and we'd talk about what the page would look like and that sort of thing. And you sort of had more responsibility. I mean, you had responsibility for more coverage, so, you know, you were writing about chefs. I was writing about more things, a wider array of things than I was when I was in Washington. So that would be what the transition was like.

[0:32:15.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. So you were mentioning a little bit about how the *Courier-Journal* was kind of like a state paper. Could you talk a little bit about is influence, like, in Louisville but also in the rest of Kentucky and kind of like what that meant?

[0:32:35.7]

Sarah Fritschner: Well, so it meant a great deal to me because I grew up, you know, sort of a few generations after its peak as a state newspaper, so the big-deal person that you should be interviewing, except she's dead, was Cissy Gregg. She was the person who brought sort of elegance into people's homes and she wrote for the Sunday magazine, which was the first—I think it was the first photogravure reproduction magazine in the country or east of the Mississippi or something renowned, and so it was this bright sort of technicolor food picture, and she wrote about—you know, she was folksy and she was, you know, knowledgeable, and she got around the state and people just adored her. I sort of grew up in the shadow of that. I mean, she was at least two food editors before—I didn't know her when I was growing up. My mom might have known who she was, and there was someone else there during my time in, you know, being aware, being a human

being who read the newspaper. I never really read her stuff, but I always heard people talk about her and respected her and loved her work. So that was a legacy. And newspapers were still well thought of at the time, so, yeah, from border to border, I mean, people said that wherever she went, people just, like, mobbed her. So everyone wanted to know or see her, talk to her. So that's what I grew up—what I came back to, I thought, from Washington was, or from my journey around the country, was to a food section, to a newspaper with a very highly regarded approach to food, whether it was recipes, feature writing, restaurant reviews, whatever, you know, there was a lot of emphasis on food.

And I think that's why Louisville is such a good food city, not because of me, but because the Binghams had two newspapers and there was a food critic in each, a restaurant critic in each newspaper, and there were food editors in each newspaper, so there was just a lot of attention on food. It was important to people, so a restaurant review would come out and people would go out to the restaurant and see—you know, they would think critically. They might not agree with the food critic. Cissy Gregg talked about entertaining, you know, living well and that sort of thing, with food. So I think that's my theory on why Louisville is such an interesting food town. [Phone Rings]

[0:35:58.3]

Annemarie Anderson: So what did you do to kind of like further that legacy or how did you kind of make the food section at the *Courier-Journal* your own?

[0:36:06.1]

Sarah Fritschner: Well, I remember somebody referring to—not somebody. The managing editor at the time referring to me as "the nuts and berries food editor." So, not with—that wasn't a compliment. [Laughter] And so I brought a nutrition background, I brought the knowledge I had gotten in Daytona, which was to go into the community and try and reflect it as well as I could, which wasn't that great, in the sense that it wasn't all that diverse at the time. And then I just started to grow, grow aware of things, I guess, a little bit. I sort of began to figure out that nutrition wasn't in a vacuum, what Michael Pollan called—what did he call it? Nutritionism or something?

Anyway, I got to understand that eating food that was good for you was something that needed to be paired—that food that was good for you had to taste good, that the old lentil loaf of yore was not going to cut it just because it was good for you, and so I just began to see—I mean, I'm sure it was a maturity issue on my part. I began to see food as a lifestyle issue rather than a health issue, and that's when I got interested in local food, because I thought people aren't going to eat food that doesn't taste good, and tomatoes from the grocery store don't taste good, and apples from the grocery store taste fine, but they're not like fresh apples. And so that's when, you know, I began to learn about—I guess in my earlier years, I'd been learning from cooks about cooking, but when I was in Louisville, I began to learn about food as an ingredient.

[Interruption; background noise]

[0:38:54.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay, that should work.

So you're learning about food?

[0:38:58.7]

Sarah Fritschner: Yeah, I guess I began to learn about the integrity of the food itself, rather than just how to make a roti on a stovetop.

[0:39:05.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Uh-huh.

[0:39:07.0]

Sarah Fritschner: I began to learn—I would contrast it by saying, you know, if I learned in Daytona about the fish banquet with the Christmas Eve fish banquet, I would—in Louisville it would be that I began to learn more about the fish that was involved, you know, that was there. In Daytona, it was all about there's always fish out there and we're going to cook this ethnic meal, where in Louisville I was more about where does the fish come from and how does that happen, you know, just more about the food itself rather than the cooking.

So that was just all wrapped up in learning to be more interested in local production and what were farmers doing and how were people eating and where there any farmers' markets. Back then, this was in the nineties, there weren't—there's one sort of hanging on. So I got involved in restoring the farmers' market, propping up or, you know, sort of marketing the farmers' market through the food section, and it became

more popular, not just me, but—it's mid-nineties, so it's ripe for, you know, explosion. So that's, I guess, that's how I began to make it my own.

Then something I'd started in Washington, in Washington it was called "The Express Lane." In Louisville, I guess we called it "The Fast Lane." It was a column back then, and it's hilarious, but it was a column back then that required ten ingredients or fewer because that's what you could get through the express lanes of the supermarket checkout, and that didn't count salt, pepper, oil, or butter, flour, and sugar. Those were free items I had, but otherwise, it was putting a whole meal on the table with ten ingredients or less. You know, I did that column for twenty years or something. I don't know how. But that was something that, you know, people talk about today.

And in Washington it was hilarious because, you know, people are working sixteen hours a day. People would use those meals as their entertaining meals because they were super fast, but they were all from scratch, you know, and back then, there was no Asian food section, you know, at the grocery store. There might be soy sauce and there might be, you know, La Choy noodles, the fried noodles in a can, but there wasn't any Sriracha sauce or Thai curry paste or, you know, rice noodles or anything like that. It was very basic in the grocery store back then. But people, you know, it'd be a boneless, skinless chicken breast with mushrooms, and then you'd deglaze it with wine and put in some, I don't know, basil, and put it on a plate with brown rice and broccoli, and it was, you know, ten ingredients or fewer, and people would entertain with that. I was, "Okay." So I did that for years.

And I guess that would—if anybody would think of anything that I contributed to the oeuvre, that would be it, is "The Fast Lane." Wrote two cookbooks, one was regular

and one was vegetarian, and, you know, kept writing that. And now I write a little tiny column for our local *Edible* magazine, and I'll be damned if I'm not doing a three-ingredient vegetable column. So, back at it. [Laughter] Roasted cherry tomatoes with, I don't know, black olives and basil or something. I can't remember. But anyway. Corn with mayonnaise, you know, the Mexican corn, mayonnaise and cheese or something, chile powder. So, yeah.

[0:43:33.1]

Annemarie Anderson: What was it like trying to come up with all these ideas for recipes throughout that time?

[0:43:37.2]

Sarah Fritschner: You know, for the first, oh, fifteen years, it was fine. Toward the end of my time, I could literally fall asleep at the typewriter, at the computer, trying to come up with *another* recipe for boneless, skinless chicken breast. And I swear to this day that I didn't quit for any other reason than I just couldn't churn out one more recipe for boneless, skinless chicken breast. It's a travesty to me. It represents everything that's wrong with America. [Laughter] I hate it. And so people gasp. I used to give talks to, like, you know, the Ladies whatever, and they'd say, "What don't you like?"

And I'd go, "Boneless, skinless chicken breast."

And they'd all go, "[Gasps] Oh, my god, that's what we live in!

"I know, and I hate it."

So, yeah. So, what was it like? It was hard writing a weekly column. James Beard, after he retired, I guess, or I guess he didn't retire, but anyway, somebody asked him if there was anything in his life he regretted or something, and he said, "Writing a weekly column."

And it was hard, it was really hard, but you just did it. That's what newspaper work is. I mean, newspaper work is you just do it. I remember reading *Bird by Bird* by Annie Lamott. Is that her name? And we read it for Book Club, and it was a wonderful book, but I got stuck on the fact that she had writer's block. And there was another girl in the Book Club who was from the newspaper, and I remember saying to her, "What do you think about this writer's block thing?" Like, you know, you can't get writer's block at a newspaper. You just freakin' type. And, you know, that's what we did. You know, if I couldn't come up with a recipe, then that was fine for about a day and a half, and then you come up with the freakin' recipe and you write it down and then you build a story around it. And a lot of times I did that. I'd come up with the recipe and then I'd look at the chicken breast recipe and go, "What the hell am I going to write this week that I haven't written in the twenty years before this?" [Sighs] And you just try to come up with something, you know. You write about the black olives and why this black olive is better than that black olive, you know. You put in your time and then you give the shopping list and the recipe. So I backed into it a lot, coming up with the recipe and the meal and then backing into the story.

[0:46:31.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. You were mentioning about—it's real interesting that the family that owned both newspapers, was that at the *Louisville Times*?

[0:46:41.1]

Sarah Fritschner: *Louisville Times* and the *Courier-Journal*.

[0:46:42.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. So there were two food editors.

[0:46:44.6]

Sarah Fritschner: Yes.

[0:46:45.9]

Annemarie Anderson: What kind of relationship did you all have with each other?

[0:46:48.8]

Sarah Fritschner: It was horrible. It was very competitive. Ask Elaine when you see her. It was very competitive. It was supposed to be competitive. Both news departments wanted to get the story first and best, and we were supposed to be super competitive and we were supposed to do things that were with an eye to being competitive. I'd never felt competitive because Elaine was so good at all the trendy stuff. I mean, she could spot a trend a mile away, and I wouldn't know it if it hit me in the head with a mallet. So we had really complementary talents, I think.

[0:47:42.3]

Annemarie Anderson: So was she at the *Times*?

[0:47:42.9]

Sarah Fritschner: She was at the *Courier* when I was at the *Times*. I came back to work at the *Louisville Times*, and then the papers combined and she left. I mean, I think she saw the writing on the wall that there would be one food editor at some point. I mean, they weren't going to fire us immediately. And she was, I guess, more mobile than I was. It was my hometown. Anyway, I wasn't considering leaving, so I guess she—you can ask her. So we were competitive and that was the culture. We were competitive. We were competitors.

[0:48:28.8]

Annemarie Anderson: What kind of staff did you have when you were food editor at the *Louisville Courier*? Was it like a large staff—well, not a large—

[0:48:37.0]

Sarah Fritschner: There was a part-time assistant food editor who kept all the files, three-by-five cards with recipes pasted on them, until later they were put in a library that is very difficult to access, but when you could access, it was wonderful. And she also answered a lot of the questions. People would call in and go, "What do I serve with chicken breast?" And you'd go, "I'll send you a great recipe, a recipe I love for broccoli

with Hollandaise sauce," or something. And she did the shopping and kind of maintained the kitchen. At the *Courier*, there was a test kitchen, because that's where Cissy Gregg had made all the food for those beautiful rotogravure, and that was part of the job if were food editor of the *Courier*, you did the Sunday magazine, and it was the tabloid that had those beautiful food shots. Then there was a Wednesday food section that both newspapers did. The *Courier-Journal* was only involved in the Sunday magazines, so she had a half-time person that helped and cleaned up the kitchen and did all that stuff. So that was the staff.

I didn't have a staff. I was part of a department, but the copy desk wrote all the headlines and cutlines for photos and stuff. I planned it with the art department and, you know, worked on the design with the art department, didn't design it, but, you know, gave input. Yeah, so no staff really.

[0:50:31.4]

Annemarie Anderson: What kind of relationship did you have with your department and the art department?

[0:50:35.1]

Sarah Fritschner: Art department was great. I worked with a young woman in the art department when I first got back to the *Times*, and, you know, they were all very professional. It wasn't like—you'd go in and you'd have issues and they'd help you work through the issues. It was pretty great. Photography was harder, making photo assignments. The photography department was probably the most prestigious—well, I'm

sure the news departments would think—I mean, they all won Pulitzers and stuff, and that was great, but the photo editor really cultivated a prestigious reputation, and the photographers were artists in a way that none of the rest of us were. So that was very stressful. I remember when I left the *Courier* in 2007, I remember being relieved that I didn't have to work with the photo department anymore, because it was stressful.

[0:51:52.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Makes sense. Too, I want to ask, because I think this is a thing that's coming through a lot of the other interviews, is kind of like the community relationship that the food editor has with her community. Like, how did you—what kind of relationship did you have with your community in Louisville and how did you cultivate that through the food section?

[0:52:18.0]

Sarah Fritschner: Well, again, reporting on—making the lead story in the Wednesday news section as locally reflective as you could, again, not writing about eggs or pumpkin pie, but writing about a woman or a man who makes pumpkin pie and what he thinks about it. And so you were always—I mean, I have no idea what people thought of me, I mean, there's no way to answer, you know, did I have a good relationship or a bad relationship. I don't know, but I had a relationship, and I would assume that it was good because it was always sort of good news, you know. It wasn't a Woodward and Bernstein, you know, look at the pumpkin pie baker. It was, you know, a sweet look at someone's live and how they cook pizza at home for their family or how they maintain a

vegetarian lifestyle or how they make their own tofu or how they use fresh herbs in cooking or, you know, any one of a number of things. I guess, again, trying to be useful, I would try and come at it from a "What do you do well that can help so many other cooks?"

One of my favorite was writing a story about a woman with many kids. I don't know if I did it under the pressure of trying to diversify my food section, which became very important in my later years, I would say. At the turn of the century, you know, we were very much encouraged to make sure that we were deliberate in approaching the diversification of faces in the paper, and I don't know if this was a result of that or not, but there was a woman, African American woman, with many children, adult, very adult children, and she lived in—I think it was kind of a split-level home, and they had a big garden out back. I didn't see it. Her husband tended the garden. And I guess she had a granddaughter who lived with her.

Anyway, she had probably five kids. They all had their own homes, but they all stopped by her place and she would either feed them or send them home with food, and it was just such a sweet story about her house as sort of a crossroads for the family, like sometimes they'd run into each other and sometimes they wouldn't. She may have had a weekly dinner with everyone there, but they all kind of came home and left to go to their own lives, but it was just a story about her recipes and cooking from the garden out back and then these adult children all coming in, almost daily coming in, either grabbing some food to take home and feed the family or sitting down and eating whatever she was cooking. But I guess there was food on the stove, like, constantly. It was a sweet story.

So you developed a relationship with the community because you were writing about the community and you were invited into the community often to speak or to groups, or a lot of people wanted you to come to their event and taste. The opera people wanted to come to the tasting of—they were all going to taste the food that was going to be served at their gala, so they'd want you to come and be part of that, I guess so you'd write about it. Anyway, that was ridiculous. [Laughter] But, anyway, you were invited into the community quite a bit, and you wrote about the community as your job. That was my job. So it was only at times when I was kind of desperate, or like at Thanksgiving or Christmas, where you had to write about how to cook a turkey, how to make gravy, that you would not write about a person. So.

[0:57:00.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Could you talk about the challenges of some of the things like maybe Christmas or Thanksgiving or the Derby, some things that you—like how you handled those situations? [Laughter]

[0:57:09.2]

Sarah Fritschner: You've heard this story before. [Laughter] I can tell you about when I quit my job. I quit my job in June, June of 2007, and I said, "I'll leave—." I gave a date in September. I told them in June that I was going to leave in September, and the managing editor called me in, and he said, "I think you should wait till the end of the year."

And I said, "Oh, really?"

And he said, "Yeah, I think, you know, you just give it the whole—just wait until January 1."

And I was like, "Okay, yeah. So that means I'll have Halloween, Thanksgiving, Hanukah, and Christmas to write about for—," I guess it would've been the thirty-first time or something. Like, "Oh, no. I'm not going to be doing that." [Laughter]

And, you know, I had all these feelings when I left my job, because it was like—it was time to leave. The world was moving on, and I wasn't moving with it and I didn't really *want* to move with—I wanted to move differently. I didn't want to move exactly the way it was going. And so I thought about it for months before I left. One of the things was, you know, I think at a certain point maybe you age out. Cissy Gregg didn't age out, but, you know, when you've written about Thanksgiving for the fifteenth or twentieth time and you're sick of it, your reader's not sick of it, and so if you write about roasting turkey at 325 degrees and making gravy the same way and making cranberry sauce, it's not their fault that you're tired of that. And so I just wondered, should there be a statute of limitations on writing for the newspaper. I mean, there are certain—institutional memory is really important for the political writers and that sort of thing, but you definitely have to have—if you're going to be the food editor, you definitely have to have a philosophy that holidays, people want to be reminded how to cook a turkey. They cook a turkey once a year. They don't remember how to cook a turkey, so you got to tell them.

So it was challenging, but it wasn't terrible. Again, you find somebody. I found a woman who cooked a turkey—how did she do it? Was it overnight? Anyway, she didn't roast it. I think she put it with a top on or something. Anyway, I had people call me all

day long for that. It was a problem solver for people. So if you found someone who had thought about it and why she did it, like I said, "It doesn't have the crispy skin."

And she said, "I know, but my kids don't know anything about crispy skin. This is the turkey they've grown up with. They love it."

And I thought, well, you know, she thought about the crispy skin, it wasn't going to be a priority. Problem solver, you know? "This is how I do it. It works for me and it can work for thousands of other turkey cooks at Thanksgiving."

So, really, reflecting your community is a way to make your job easier, because you don't have to come up with that. But the other thing about it is that you're always learning, so whatever you're giving to the community, you're getting back at least equally, I think, yeah.

[1:01:05.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's really great. That's so interesting. What's the question? I totally forget. Oh, I remember what the question is now. What was it like—so, over your time, because you spent several years just in Louisville as a food editor, over your time as food editor there, what—how did Louisville, like, evolve and change, especially its food scene?

[1:01:33.3]

Sarah Fritschner: So I didn't really cover restaurants all that much, but—so the history part of Louisville was that there was a family that owned an Italian restaurant called Casa Grisanti's, and when I was fourteen, I was taken there on my birthday, so that would've

been 1968. That was quite a year in history in America. It had red checkered tablecloths and Chianti bottles with candles. Over the years, I guess when the sons took over, it became something called Northern Italian, and I remember that it became very fancy. I won't try to describe the interior, but there were no red-and-white tablecloths anymore, and it was very fancy, very high end, and they were very particular about their chefs, and they hired a lot of people to be in the kitchen, and that group of people, who would've been my age, all graduated and went out and opened independent—not all, but many, many of the people who'd worked their way up through the Grisanti family restaurant opened independent restaurants, not chain restaurants, you know, things with their name or their concept. And there were many that were open, and that, I think, was a sort of little boomlet of the independent restaurant scene. When people talk about Louisville being a good restaurant town, that was what started it.

And the other was a businessman, I guess, he wasn't a foodie at all, he opened something called the Bristol Bar & Grille, and he was also a baby boomer, but it was a restaurant, and, you know, it's still there. I mean, there are many Bristols now, but they served romaine lettuce in their salads, and so it was the first sort of casual burger place, a bistro-y kind of thing that Louisville had. They had kind of family restaurants that today might have been like a Bennigan's or an O'Charley's or whatever they are these days, you know, like Formica. One was Pryor's and one was—I don't know. They might've been family-owned, but they were just, you know, Formica tables and, you know, not that interesting. And the Bristol kind of took it up a notch so that it was still family, it was the kind of place you could go with your family and eat a meal that was pretty good and interesting food, not all out-of-the-freezer food, you know.

So those two things, I think, were what happened. The baby boomers graduated out of this Casa Grisanti's world and spread out and opened restaurants, and the Bristol kind of made inexpensive eating a thing. You know, now both my kids go out to eat all the time for everything. The Bristol was the first of those restaurants. Most of the others, the Casa Grisanti's graduates, many of them opened fine dining. We could talk about that for a long time, but, you know, I would say fine dining or, you know, not the kind of place you just drop in and have a burger and a salad with romaine lettuce instead of iceberg. The Bristol did that, made casual dining, you know, fun, yeah. So that's how it changed. Is that okay?

[1:05:48.3]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, that's great. What were some of your greatest successes that you feel—I mean, it doesn't have to be like a milestone or something that you did, just maybe like personal growth or something while you worked at the *Journal* during those years?

[1:06:09.0]

Sarah Fritschner: I would say in personal growth, I started an event called the Ohio Valley Harvest Festival in the mid-nineties, maybe early nineties, probably mid-nineties, and what I was trying to do was increase the amount of local food available to restaurants, and so I and others—I mean, many people were involved with it—ended up putting on this function on what's called the Belvedere in Louisville, which is a riverfront property that is downtown, so it's like a plaza or something, and it's attached to the

Center for the Arts and people go there. They had a little ice-skating rink. I don't know if they still do. Festivals are held there.

So we had the Ohio Valley Harvest Festival, and the concept was that we paired a farmer with a chef, and the chef was supposed to pay the farmer for the product that he got or she got, and they would use that product in something that they would serve at the festival, and the farmer would set up right next to them, so that the theory was this would develop a relationship between the farmer and the restaurateur so that a certain percentage would end up having a relationship and buying product from that person.

So we probably had twenty or thirty chefs and twenty or thirty farmers from all over, I mean a garlic farmer from Madison County, which is sort of eastern Kentucky, came, and a beef farmer and a—I'm trying to think of Brian's last name. I can't remember anything. But one of these graduates from the Casa Grisanti empire made butternut squash—what did he call it? Soup. Bisque. Butternut squash bisque from butternut squash that was grown in southern Indiana by a farmer, and they ended up having a relationship. I remember the farmer telling me that he had never liked butternut squash and he ate this bisque, and the chef, who was very creative, very high-end chef, you know, put this little compote on top that, you know, had sweet, salty, chunky, sour stuff in it, and it was just unbelievable.

And you came in. As a consumer, you would come in, you would buy tickets for a dollar or two dollars apiece, and the chefs would sell their product for whatever they determined, three dollars, two dollars, whatever, and then they got the money. The point was to sort of reward them for using local, and so the money went back to the chef for

setting up and taking all that time to—so we tried to make it a fun event for them that they didn't lose their shirts on.

And we probably did that for three years, maybe, four years, and it was wonderful. It was a wonderful thing. But the way it got started was I and a girlfriend, who was a farmer, were sitting in a bar one day and we said, "We ought to have a party," kind of thing. And so I just went and started doing it. And she came in sort of mid-conversation, I mean, weeks had gone by and I was already planning it and, you know, putting the information out and trying to recruit people and calling the Kentucky Pork Producers and asking them where I could get a local pork and having him try and talk me out of it because commodity pork was what it was all about, and she called and she just went off. She was *so* anxious/angry. She just kind of read me the riot act. She was a good friend. And she was like, "You're going to need Port-a-Potties and you're going to need this and you're going to need that."

And I just remember—and it was all this stuff, all these details that I hadn't thought about hadn't gotten to. I don't know. Liquor license. I mean, all this stuff, and I just thought—my first thought was, "I've got to stop. I've got to stop this project." And then I didn't. I just had to suck it up and go on, because I was in the middle of it. And it doesn't translate well here, but I just remember being panic-stricken and sucking it up, and it was really a huge—it was a huge hurdle in my life of having all this negative feedback, being scared out of my wits, and wanting to go away, crawl under a rock, be invisible, take it all back, and not being able to, and just having to move forward as if I was confident and as if I knew what I was doing. And I did it and it worked, and she came along, and it worked out really well and people loved the event.

Oh, Farm Aid came to town while it was going on. I guess—yeah, I guess the Farm Aid concert was in Louisville that year, and they came down and saw it, and they still talk about it. They still say, whenever we see each other, they start saying, "Remember that festival you put on? That was the most—you were years, you were decades ahead of your time." And, you know, I just think it's hysterical. But anyway, that was their perspective.

So that was the most—in terms of personal growth, that was the biggest, most dramatic, you know, non-incremental period of my adulthood, I think.

In terms of the community, I think it's hard to tell. You have no idea what you've left the community with, but the most feedback I get is the column, the fast-food column where people could cook from scratch fairly easily and fairly—you know, it was supposed to be dinner. It was supposed to be fairly nutritious. There wasn't a ton of cream and everything, you know. It was always seasonal. I mean, it was not ever unseasonal, is what I mean. I never wrote a recipe for sweet potatoes in July, and I never wrote a recipe for raspberries in February, you know. It was fairly seasonal and fairly nutritious, no—you know, not obsessively so, and people just used those recipes like crazy. Even now, I mean, I was somewhere last night and someone said, "I have this recipe, I still use it, my kids love it."

I met a millennial who, when she had her first baby, her mother made her something that had been—with boneless, skinless chicken breast—that had been—it was a wrap. It was a recipe that Mom made for her birthday every year. It was her favorite food. When she had a baby, her mom made it for her and brought it to her. So, you know, I left—as I said on Facebook one time, I'm responsible for 7,195 recipes for boneless,

skinless chicken breast that I will—what'd I say? I'm not responsible for—I have to account for 7,195 recipes for boneless, skinless chicken breast in hell. [Laughter] So, anyway, you know, that's, I guess, my legacy, is there is one, which I can't imagine that there is, but if there is. Before women my age die, that will be it.

[1:15:13.1]

Annemarie Anderson: What years did you do the Harvest Festival?

[1:15:16.2]

Sarah Fritschner: I remember it—let me do the math. I think the first one was in [19]94. I think that was my fortieth birthday. I remember thinking my fortieth year was the year that, like, I became an adult or something, you know, that I had this huge pressure and that I overcame it and got to experience this joy afterward. It was really a wonderful event, I mean, [Whispers] if I do say so myself. It was really fun and celebratory and delicious and easy to access, and it never rained.

[1:16:09.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's awesome. [Laughter]

[1:16:10.8]

Sarah Fritschner: I know, I know. Yeah, I think it was [19]94, 19]95, [19]96, maybe.

[1:16:17.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. This seemed to become, like, a theme. You were talking about earlier in our interview about how you were kind of like coming to terms and understanding about the food itself and not just like dishes or ideas about it. I guess we could start and talk a little bit about, like, what you've decided to do after your career in journalism, because your activism is really—and the work that you do at the local farm-to-table and now Grow Kentucky, could we talk a little bit about that and why you decided to get into that and how your journalism might have, like—and the things that you learned in Louisville during that time helped you get to this point?

[1:17:05.0]

Sarah Fritschner: So I left my job in 2007 because I thought it was time, because I didn't want to write another Thanksgiving story, but also because the pressure to churn out material—that was in 2007. That's when—is that when it was? I guess so. When the full realization that everything was going to be digital finally hit Gannett, and also the fact that Gannett wanted to make more money and wanted to have 20 percent return on stocks or whatever, investments, and so they were cutting staff drastically and increasing output requirements, so they wanted you go produce for the daily paper, plus I was producing for the weekend paper, plus they wanted this whole digital presence. And then my boss wanted me to figure out all the nutrient data for all the recipes, which is a good, like, half day of inputting data. So the workload increased dramatically while the standards were going down, so it was basically you were transitioning from being a reporter, where you went into the community, found people to write about, whatever, and

I felt more like a typist, you know. I was just getting it out as fast I possibly could. So it was less rewarding.

In the meantime, they wanted lots of things about the community. They wanted, like—what did they call it? Clickbait, you know, so which wasn't really aligned with my value system. I don't think that's their fault, you know. I'm just kind of stodgy. I'm just not a clickbait type. I don't read *People* magazine much. So it was just our value systems were dividing. I was doing more about what I thought was important, you know, local—writing about local producers and writing about people who had ideas about food, and, you know, doing some—not—I don't want to make it seem grand or something, but it was not how sorority, you know, two aging sorority sisters pull off a party, you know. It was like—which was what my boss was asking me to do, you know. And I was just like, "That doesn't mean anything to me." So it was just clear that our values were parting ways. I didn't get much self-worth out of typing a recipe, and they weren't really interested in me being thoughtful or, you know, whatever I thought I was being.

Anyway, so I just thought it was time to go, and I was very clear that I was never going to write about food again. I'd had it. I wasn't interested in food anymore, and the jobs I went out for, people were like, "Oh, you can do this," and it was always food.

And I was like, "No, I'm not doing food."

So I ended up doing just freelancing press releases and just stuff like that, and working with community development groups in underserved communities and things, writing grants and things, and just figuring out, like, where I thought my ideals were. Maybe I didn't have much talent for what I thought I believed about the universe, my

talents didn't align with that, so I might have wanted to work within an underserved community, but there was nothing I brought to that that was going to help anybody.

So after a good year of not being in the food section at the *Courier*, I realized that it wasn't food I hated; it was boneless, skinless chicken breast, so I became more—I felt better about food and I was working as an editor at an independent magazine in Louisville, and, you know, just finding work that was good. I mean, I think I made more money than I did at the *Courier*.

But anyway, and then I heard about a study that had been done for the City of Louisville, and it was a study on how to find markets for farmers. Louisville is the biggest market in the state. The state was sort of reeling from the decline in the tobacco economy. County judges from around Louisville had come to the mayor and said, "Your city could bring us prosperity," or more prosperity. So they formed this group, got a study done. The study said here are several ways you can bring more local food into the city successfully, and one of those ways was to have this what they're now calling a value chain coordinator, which is someone who sees the market, sees the farmer, and sees maybe ways to solve issues in between the farmer and the market. It's not the straight drive of a pickup truck, the way everybody imagines it is. So what are the things in between the farmer and the market that prevent the farmer from getting his dollar in the market?

So that was one of the things that this study recommended, was to have this value chain coordinator. There were other—they suggested having a wholesale market downtown of local goods. They suggested having a farmers' market coalition that would

help promote the farmers all over the city, because we had many, many farmers' markets in Louisville.

So I found the person in the city who was in charge of the study, called staff. She wasn't—she was just a worker in the city, but she was in charge of that whole group of mayors and, you know, she did the staff. She was staff for the mayor, and so she made sure that everything was ushered through the channels it was supposed to be ushered through, and she ended up hiring me, making a case to have me hired for this position, this value chain coordinator.

So that was in 2009, July of 2009, and I did that until December 31st, 2017, and then I became an independent consultant, so I'm still paid by a foundation. The farmers don't have to pay me or, you know, I don't get a finder's fee or I don't get money from the transaction at all. I'm paid by a third party. But it's the same work. I do the same work, which is trying to find markets for farm goods.

I ended up, I think uniquely, concentrating on large-volume buyers because in my mind, it helps a farmer more to sell in large volume, and the people who can sell in small volume do it, you know, if they're at a farmers' market or they have a CSA, you know. Those enterprises exist, where there has been no way for farmers to access the institutional large-volume wholesale markets. And so that's what I worked on for lo these many years. [Laughter]

[1:26:00.8]

Annemarie Anderson: What was the learning curve going from, like, a background you spent so much time writing, now you're going into something and you're doing this work and you're marketing these folks?

[1:26:10.1]

Sarah Fritschner: Yeah, the learning curve was immense, and it was a 90-degree—I mean, no one can imagine how difficult the work is. I couldn't when I got into it. I almost can't now. The only people who know how hard it is are the people who are involved in it, and that's an entirely different conversation, but there are contracts written in large volume, by large-volume buyers. It's a world of contracts and they are all written to exclude the farmer, and they all depend on money changing hands. So no one has incentive to change the contract, and most—virtually all corporate offices are not in Kentucky, and so no one is getting incentive from his neighbor to change anything. [Laughter]

So we are trying to deal with dining service contractors who might have a headquarters in Philadelphia or Paris, France, or Charlotte, North Carolina, where the spreadsheet is king and pennies make a difference and contracts make a difference. So even if the local farmer could come in at exactly the same price as the national provider, the national providers has paid the national food service provider for the privilege of selling him food. So no one wants a local farmer involved, so it's just been very special.

[1:28:08.6]

Annemarie Anderson: I bet. How is the food—well, I guess agriculturally in this exchange in markets, how has it changed, like, have you seen any growth during this period?

[1:28:24.5]

Sarah Fritschner: Oh, yeah, there's been—I couldn't have lasted if there hadn't been growth. The University of Kentucky has a contract with its dining service provider, Aramark, which states that they will spend I'm going to say seventeen percent of their dollars on food that is local. Some of that food is only from a local processor, so it might be beef that's shipped in from somewhere else and is fabricated here, but more than $600,000 of it is food that has what I call direct farm impact, which is separate from local food in the sense that it goes—ultimately the money that's paid for the food goes to a farmer.

So it could go to a—like, Weisenberger mill is a local mill in Kentucky, fifth or sixth generation now. They buy wheat from Kentucky farmers and mill it into their all-purpose flour, and they have baking mixes, like Spoonbread Mix and Biscuit Mix and stuff. That's all Kentucky flour. So it could be that UK buys Weisenberger flour from Sysco, but ultimately the dollar goes back to a Kentucky farmer. So they're not necessarily handing the money to the farmer when they buy it, but—so that's six hundred-and-some-thousand dollars that they would spend, and they went into that, if I may say, kind of kicking and screaming. I mean, they weren't happy to be doing that. The first time they said, "We spent money locally," they were supposed to spent $2 million on local food, and they spent a million of it on Coca-Cola, which has a local bottling plant,

and they were completely satisfied with that report, and so the community revolted and they took another look at their specifications, and now they're making more of an effort to make sure some of that money ends up in the hands of farmers. I've been at this almost ten years. [Laughter] And that's great.

And we just had a meeting with Eastern Kentucky University, also an Aramark school, and they said that they're one hundred percent committed to adding local product to their dining services. So, I mean, lots of people say things that aren't followed through on, but that is a great sign.

Norton Hospital in Louisville, they hire—they're five hospitals. They hire a group called Morrison, which is part of Compass Group International, huge service provider of all kinds, that they own Morrison and Morrison has been buying local food, local produce and local beef, which is huge, here in Kentucky. We have more beef than any other state east of the Mississippi, so it's great when we can sell local beef to anyone.

So, yeah, it's definitely moving, and I would say virtually every independently owned restaurant in Louisville uses something local, even if they're not claiming they do. You know, it's becoming second nature. So, yes, I've seen a huge change. There's a *huge* amount to do, huge amount. There's many, many, many, many more steps we need to take to break down the barriers of local food into a market, into a local market, but there are a lot more people in it now than there were in 2009 when I entered, and they're all working really hard, they're all doing great jobs, and people are beginning to think it's important. I mean, when I say people, I mean people outside the foodie—people identified as, you know, housewives who shop at farmers' markets or something. Now men with power, white men with power in government are beginning to understand that

they need to think about it, even if they aren't for it or against it or whatever they—you know, it's beginning to enter people's consciousness outside the traditional, you know, tiny percentage of foodie types, I think.

[1:33:20.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. That's so great. So now you went from Louisville and you're really working in the whole state?

[1:33:26.4]

Sarah Fritschner: So Louisville farm-to-table—so, LL's the biggest market in Kentucky, so when you want to find a product—if you want to find local food for Jefferson County Public Schools, which is Louisville, you have to find product that will feed 60,000 children lunch one day. That's how many lunches they serve. So you're not going to find that in Louisville. So Louisville farm-to-table is more about finding farmers to bring product to Louisville because we're the biggest market. It's not that Louisville will supply its own product. I always had to go outside of Louisville to find a product.

So LaRue County is Hodgenville. That's where Abraham Lincoln was born. It's probably forty-five minutes south of Louisville. That's where there's farmland to grow enough butternut squash to bring to Jefferson County Public Schools. Owen County, which is up I-71 on the way to Cincinnati, you know, that's where the orchard is where they grow apples to bring into Jefferson County. So, yeah, it's always been about more than Louisville. Louisville was the market. We had to go outside into the rural areas to

find product to bring to Louisville. So that's easily confused, I know. Sounds like it should be just Louisville, but it's about Louisville supporting the rest of the state.

[1:35:06.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Gotcha. What kind of relationships have you built with farmers across Kentucky?

[1:35:13.6]

Sarah Fritschner: I don't know. You'll have to ask the farmers. [Laughter] I don't know what kind of relationship. I help them as often as I can and try to listen to their concerns as well as I can, and try to find markets that fit them as well as I can, but it's still a learning curve for all of us because, you know, it used to be all about tobacco in Kentucky, and now—and even cattle—I mean, a tobacco farm would have cattle on it, but they would go to the auction, and they still go to the auction. I mean, I'm sure that ninety eight percent of the cattle in Kentucky still go to the auction and get shipped out to feedlots in the Midwest.

But, you know, we're imperfectly trying to find the balance of getting food, local food to local markets, and if there's a beef producer who wants to try a local market—and a lot of them don't. I mean, buying a bunch of cattle, having a bunch of moms who have a bunch of babies who grow to be heifers, putting them on a truck and take them to the auction, you know, you can work at Ford and do that, and it's easy and you get money and you can live in the country because that's where you want to live. So it's not a

fit for everyone, but if it is a fit or people are interested in exploring it, then I just do what I can.

Again, it's hard for me to judge what kind of relationship I have with people, but in the best of all possible worlds, I hear them tell me what goals they have for themselves, what size market they want to produce for, and how they want to access that market. Some people don't want—some people want to sell everything they have today on a truck, ship it away, be done. Some people want to sell a little bit all the time. I mean, some people want to chop it up and put it in a bag and sell it. So it just depends on what people's goals are. And if they have goals that they're not reaching, can I help them reach their goal? Can I explain to them what the market is asking for and see if they can fit into that? And that sort of thing. And so I hope that all results in a good relationship, but I couldn't say for sure that it does. [Laughter]

[1:37:47.2]

Sarah Fritschner: That's great. Where do you see yourself, I guess, going with this? Well, let me rephrase that. [Laughter] Or what do you hope will come out of this process?

[1:38:01.7]

Sarah Fritschner: Well, what I see now is a lot of young—especially young women entering the field who have an incredible amount of talent and get what I would say—what I would say is that they get it. They understand that there are challenges involved in a way that I didn't, and they understand a farmer point of view, which a lot of people—consumers don't. They're like, "We want the product. Why can't you get it?" You know.

So I would say that there is a much larger community now than there was in 2009 of people trying to do this work and who are doing it well and in many different ways. So I have a colleague in Lexington who does what I do, but she has a community of people who compliment her work. And I do, too, really. They're just not in Louisville, you know. They're all here and talking and colleagues and peers, and I'm in Louisville and I have to drive in order to access a lot of that. [Laughter] But so the community of problem solvers has grown, and I'm so thrilled with that. I'm really thrilled with that. There's been a lot of change. It's just so hard. People lose hope sometimes that change will happen, but, you know, when you look at education or Black Lives Matter or, you know, women's equal pay, you know, lots of issues take a long time and it can't be—you know, people—when I started this, people thought you put it in a pickup truck and you drove it to the next county. Just everything, everything is wrong with that thought, and I thought that too. I thought, "Oh, I just need to tell them that's there's a buyer." Well, if you want ribeye, where are you going to sell the hamburger? And, you know, so you just have to find out where you're going to sell the hamburger before you ever start talking about the ribeye. And so there's just a lot of challenges, and I am just delighted to see a whole lot of people who have the perseverance and the brains to keep it going. Really happy about that.

[1:40:31.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[1:40:32.4]

Sarah Fritschner: Yeah, it is.

[1:40:35.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, I have kept you for a long time.

[1:40:37.8]

Sarah Fritschner: You have.

[1:40:38.6]

Annemarie Anderson: I have. An hour and forty minutes. [Laughter] I'm sorry about that. Is there anything else that you would like to add that you haven't said?

[1:40:51.4]

Sarah Fritschner: No, I'm just embarrassed that this is all happening, and I just feel like, you know, like to me the people who are food editors are—it's one reason I'm not part of Southern Foodways Alliance. I mean, John Egerton, you know, would—he just kept saying, "You got to do this."

And I'm like, "I'm not Southern. I'm not—you know, I don't know anything about Southern food." It's like I don't know about grits and I don't know about—you know. Anyway, so everybody, you know, Elaine and Dottie and all those people seem like legitimate, and I was doing, you know, fast cooking. Just doesn't seem the same. So, anyway, no, there's nothing I want to say. Make me look thinner than I do. [Laughter]

[1:41:51.5]

Annemarie Anderson: It's been very wonderful to talk to you.

[1:41:54.2]

Sarah Fritschner: Thank you. [Laughter]

[1:41:54.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Thank you.

[End of interview]