Kitty Crider

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[00:00:01.20]

Annemarie N.: Okay, we're rollin'. Good afternoon—good morning.

[00:00:05.10]

Kitty C.: Good morning.

[00:00:06.12]

Annemarie N.: Good morning. I'm in Austin, Texas. This is Annemarie Nichols recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance at the home of Ms. Kitty Crider. Could you start off and introduce yourself for the recorder?

[00:00:17.26]

Kitty C.: Yes. Good morning, Amy, how are you? I've been fortunate enough to be a food editor most of my life—my career life, my adult life. It's been a pleasure. I got into this field when . . . well, I say I got introduced to it in high school. Ironically, it was because I was a good speller. This was before spell check, and they needed somebody to proofread the high school paper. When I was a sophomore, I was recruited, and by the time I was a senior, I was editor of it. I enjoyed journalism, and so when I graduated, I was interested in pursuing journalism, but I had also been successful in the food field. It was my mother, interestingly, who did not go to college, who suggested I combine the two into a career. So, I attended the University of Tennessee, which was one of the few schools, back then, that you could get a combination or put those two interests together. So, I put those two together, journalism and home economics/food. It's been a wonderful career. It's been a great career. I've done this all my life, and I just absolutely love it. I've been in Austin, Texas since the late [19]70s, was a food editor at the *Austin American Statesman* for nearly thirty years, and prior to that, I was a food editor in Huntsville, Alabama for a number of years. I have always lived in the South. I was born in Mississippi, went to school in Tennessee, lived in Alabama, and live in Texas all these years. So, it's been a wonderful, wonderful, rich opportunity, and absolutely fascinating. When I got into the business, it was mostly like being a recipe lady, but that has changed so drastically, because food has changed so drastically. I've never been bored because of all these

changes. You know, there's so much more it to, because there's dietetics to it, or nutrition. There's food safety. We've gotten into celebrity chefs. There's all these ethnic foods. There's different ways of cooking. I was thinking just this morning that, when I started doing this, we didn't have microwave ovens and we didn't have food processors. I believe crock pots were out there, for the first time, but now they've made a resurgence. We had blenders, but not Vitamix. There are so many different appliances and ways of cooking things, that I've seen how food has evolved and cooking has evolved and just the whole food scene. Now, we have all these delivery services that supply the prepared foods. So, it's been a fabulous thing to see how much of this, how it's changed, and it's kept my interest. And it's been a wonderful career. Earlier, when I began, we did not have the internet. We didn't have social media, we didn't have emails. So, the food editor in a city was kind of a major authority on food. So, she—or he—would go to a lot of things. We would judge a lot of things. Usually, there were only one or two, maybe, food editors per city, so it wasn't a lot of job opportunities. In fact, when I moved to Austin, the food editor job was filled here. So, I did some other things until it opened up. So, it's been a really interesting way to see how all of this has changed. And it has changed me. One of the biggest changes I think I've seen is the microwave. When I first did a story on microwaves, I worked on it and studied on it and investigated it and interviewed about it for, gosh, almost six months. That's the longest story— one of the longer stories I've worked on. In the process, I sold myself on one, and when I finished the story, I bought a microwave oven. By then, I'd gotten to know a good bit about it. Next thing I know, I was actually doing some freelance work, teaching microwave cooking classes because most women had never cooked—or men—had cooked with a microwave oven. I think that's been one of the biggest changes that I've seen in the field. The food processor has been a big change, too. Several years ago, General Electric introduced a halogen oven that cooked by light, and I read up on it, and I thought, "Now, this is very innovative. Is this going to be the next microwave oven?" The more I read, the more I thought, "Well, maybe it is." So I talked GE into letting me come and test in their test kitchen up in Louisville. And I went up there and they let me come in there and cook all sorts of things for two or three days, and I wrote about it. I really thought it would go more than it did, but it did not. It has not become the next microwave oven, but it was fascinating to think

that I was cooking with lightbulbs. So, those are some of the impressions I have as far as how the food field has changed. We'll talk a little bit more about 'em as you and I visit.

[00:05:49.28]

Annemarie N.: Yeah, definitely. I want to kind of go back to the beginning and, for the record, could you give your birthday, and then could you talk a little bit about where you were born and what it was like growing up there?

[00:06:01.29]

Kitty C.: Sure. Now, just for the record, I'm a Southern girl, I don't do the birthday thing, okay?

[00:06:10.07]

Annemarie N.: You could just give me the date, not the year, if you want. [Laughter]

[00:06:12.01]

Kitty C.: Okay, all right. I was born in Starkville, Mississippi. I was actually born on the Mississippi State University campus and I grew up basically on the campus. We were associated with the university, and so it had a heavy influence in my life, living on a college campus. I think that adds a lot to a town. So, I grew up in Mississippi. My mother did not work at the time. She cooked the main meal at noon, and it was called dinner in the South at that time, and it was a hot meal. Every morning, before school, it was my job to wash the dishes—and I was short, I stood on a little blue box and washed the dishes before I left for school every morning. I grew up with cooking, an important part of the family, an important part of our family life. When I was, like, four or five, I was the mud pie queen of the neighborhood. I really was. I had my little pans out there and I cooked with sand in the sand pile and I'd add little flowers off of the bushes and I would decorate. I would get big leaves and put mud in 'em and roll 'em up before I ever knew what tamales were. It was always fun for me, and food was cherished. It was not tossed away or thrown away. It was not wasted. So, I grew up with that background. I do remember one time when I was probably five or six putting my patent leather Sunday purse in my mother's oven without her knowledge. She pre-heated the oven for

cornbread, and then there was this awful smell. She opened the oven and my purse was dripping between the racks. I'm sure she wanted to skin me, but she did not, and I didn't really get punished for that. Instead, she said, "Okay, it's time for you to learn to cook." So, she used that as an opportunity. I've always admired her for having done that. I could have been banned for the kitchen for life after that mess, but she did not. My grandfather was an agronomist with the university, and he did a lot of seed research. I shelled more than my share of peas. We shucked a lot of different corn things. He tested things both in his private gardens and also at the university, so I grew up with a hands-on knowledge of food. Early, early on at one point, we had a few chickens, so I can remember Mother candling eggs. I can remember collecting eggs. I had a relationship with food that was outside of a grocery store. My daddy had some cattle. We butchered one every year or something and it went to a locker plant. So, it was—in the South, the South is not a rich part of the country, necessarily, and if you grew something or produced something, and then you prepared it and you shared with your guests, that was a true labor of love, and I was taught that. So, I've always believed that, when you cook for somebody or prepare for somebody, it's a real gesture of love and hospitality. Today, a lot of times, we all go out to eat and that's fine, but I understand that you give of what you have, and in the South, it was giving of their garden and giving of their work. They always offered seconds or second helpings. Not sure we do that now, though.

[00:09:53.27]

Annemarie N.: That's great. So, you went to the University of Tennessee. Can you talk about your experiences there? Were you involved in the student newspaper?

[00:10:03.28]

Kitty C.: I was involved in the student newspaper. I was probably the only one that was in the home economics college, and also doing journalism. I was involved in it. I reported on the home economics college, basically, for the student newspaper. I was probably not as active in that student newspaper. I had also written for the local paper—in addition to my high school paper, I had written for the local paper in my hometown, and I had written . . . but probably, although I did report for the student newspaper at the University of

Tennessee, I think there are other newspapers or other beats that might have had a more active coverage. Maybe sports or something else. But I wasn't doing sports at that time. Took a lot of journalism courses, though.

[00:10:50.16]

Annemarie N.: Cool. Were there any, like, mentors or folks while you were there, or while you were in high school, who really kind of impacted you?

[00:11:01.05]

Kitty C.: I had a home economics teacher, Mrs. Valentine, and she, ironically, had taught my mother. She guided me. I would say she was one that I would say thank you. And I had an English teacher, John Hartman, a senior English teacher that taught me so much about writing. And I've always been very grateful to him.

[00:11:27.12]

Annemarie N.: That's great. After you went, after the University of Tennessee, you got a job in Huntsville.

[00:11:33.23]

Kitty C.: I did. Now, as I said earlier, when you move to a town, the food editor job is not necessarily available for you. But when I moved, I interviewed at the paper, and they already had a food editor, but I learned that she was going to get married, and they said, "Just hang in the background, and we'll call you when she gets married." So, I took another job and I worked in a home lighting store. I had some experience in that, too. I told my boss, I said, "My heart's in this journalism job." And he was okay with that. Then, when the current food editor left to get married, then I moved into the job. Most of those were not full-time food editor jobs. Early on, food editor jobs, you often did other things. I worked in the features department as the food editor, food writer-editor, but I also typed up an awful lot of bridal announcements and engagement announcements and garden club reports and sorority reports and other feature stories, and did individual features. That was kind of fun, too. So, I can remember interviewing Betty White. Look

at here, she's still around and going strong, and that was always fun. There were other opportunities there, as well.

[00:12:52.11]

Annemarie N.: That's really neat. So what was, I guess, the features section in Huntsville like at that time? Because now, Huntsville has kind of, like, become this boomtown and it's growing, but back then—

[00:13:05.03]

Kitty C.: Actually, back then, it was. It was when I was there. It was very boomtown because of the space program. All the rockets and all the space program. My husband worked for IBM and we moved there right out of college. We had married in school, and we moved right out of college. It was a very boomtown situation, and a lot of opportunity. They had civic centers and they had symphonies and ballet. It was not a sleepy Southern town. It was a fun place to be, and lots of high tech companies there. We met a lot of high tech friends, and we stayed there. We worked on a number of projects. Wernher von Braun, the rocket scientist, he lived just a few days up from us.

[00:14:00.07]

Annemarie N.: Oh, wow.

[00:14:00.16]

Kitty C.: Never saw him, but we knew he was in the neighborhood. It was—Redstone Arsenal was there, it was very active. It was an exciting time. My husband actually worked some on the rocket program, space program, and so, it was kind of exciting to go to these museums now, to go to NASA, and see, okay, I worked on that, I worked on that. It was an exciting time to be there. Then IBM decided to close their Huntsville facility, and they were going to do it in waves. We were in the first wave, and they were shipping out five hundred families at one time. That was kind of hard. I was actually sitting in the newsroom, working at my desk, when the IBM public relations person came in. I said, "Hey, John, what's happening?" And he hands me a release, and it was being released at

that one time everywhere. The employees didn't know it; it was being released. So, I'm sitting there reading that announcement that they're closing the facility, and I'm seeing my future change. That was kind of dramatic. We've never forgotten that. Of course, the phone lines were jammed as people tried to reach each other. And the time of trying to sell a house when there were five hundred other houses on the market . . . what we ended up doing, my husband had already put in a request for Austin previously, otherwise the program he was working on was transferred to New York. He was not sure how well I would fare in an area it had so much gray weather. So, we had six months. He went and transferred his program to New York, and stayed in Huntsville and continued my job, and also showed our house and took care of our little kids. Then we moved out here to Austin, and have loved being out here. We already had a couple of friends, families out here that we knew; that made it easier. Some people might get upset by my saying this, but I had been very happy in Huntsville. We wanted to come to Austin, but I got here, and I kind of had some culture shock. I did not know that trees could be so crooked. I did not know about sand burrs. When we killed a rattlesnake or two and a coral snake on our property, and I was the mother of young, young boys, I was like, "Wow." So, I had a little bit of a culture shock. It was kind of interesting—I may have told you this, the very first bridal shower I went to out here, they served tamales and a longneck beer. I was stunned. Where was the punch and petit fours, you know? So, obviously, I wasn't in the South anymore—or at least, not at that particular party. There are other parties that have been touches of the South, but I suddenly realized that Central Texas, Austin, Texas, was different. So, I embraced it. We've loved, I love it. But I had to learn.

[00:17:22.24]

Annemarie N.: That's great. So, you're mentioning this culture shock and this difference. It's a big difference. What was it like—I know you didn't get a job right away, but what was it like? Could you talk about your journey to getting the job at the *Austin American Statesman*?

[00:17:41.21]

Kitty C.: Because it was a major change, a move for my family—and I had wanted to have a family. I wanted to be a mother. I grew up in the South, I had a great mother, great father, and so I wanted to be a mother. I thought, "This is a major move for my family; let me get them in schools, get them settled in the community." And so, for about a year maybe—because the food editor job was not open—I did freelance. And I did soccer mom. I was vice president of the PTA. I was team leader for the swim team. I was very active in my community. And I started writing freelance a little bit for the *Statesman* in a capacity like that; a neighbor association—not neighbor association, but they had a section called *The Neighbor*. So I reported on North Austin, Northwest Austin. I got to know the *Statesman* a little bit better and they got to know me. I thought, well, maybe I will be doing something else. In fact, I had been asked to do another job and was seriously considering it when the *Statesman* job opened up. So, that kind of—it felt like home. I walked in and interviewed and walked out with an assignment. I've been there since then. I treated it—at first, I kind of did it like a freelance job or part-time job, because I still had small children. Then, we were working with Selectric typewriters, so I bought me an Selectric typewriter that the machine could read, and I did all my stories that way; I took things in. But the job of a food editor involved a whole lot more than—it's not just reporting and writing. When you're the food person for a paper, and Austin is considered a mid-size paper. Probably, at that time, a half a million people were here, maybe. Now, we are the eleventh largest city in the country—not, that's the city, the metro area, we're not quite that large. So, I was the food person. So, that means that you report your stories. You test the recipes. You set up the food shots. You maybe food style. You write the stories. You edit; you may be reading the wires, making contacts. At the time, you were considered kind of a local celebrity, like a television anchor or something, so you judge things, you went to charitable things, you know. You were willing to let somebody throw a pie in your face for a good cause. So, we did a bunch of different things like that. I found that the food job is 24/7, because food is 24/7, and everything just about in my life could possibly have a food implication, a food story implication. If I were having trouble with something, probably other readers were, and how could I help them? It was all about helping the readers with their lives, and also telling them good stories, and also helping to educate them on changes and things that

they might not have thought about. We were really wanting to maybe help correct some things, as well. It was not a vicious job; it was, how can I help? It was a consumer, treated like a consumer job.

[00:21:33.21]

Annemarie N.: That's great. You mentioned your connection with your audience, could you talk a little about that? 'Cause with half a million people in Austin, that's a really big readership.

[00:21:42.22]

Kitty C.: It is a big readership. They called a lot and wrote a lot, and we tried to always answer our phone and always respond to them. We did a lot of interaction things with them. It's kind of interesting. The first publisher of the paper here in Austin, or the guy who was publisher when I arrived, he had a practice that, if you had a food picture, you had to have a face in it. Every photo had to have a face in it. That's—in principle, in my mind, that's a good rule, because people are drawn to faces. But it also created competition; when you look at a photograph, am I lookin' at this food or am I lookin' at the face? You know, you hold the pie up by your face, do you sit down at a table so your face is closer to whatever food you're talking about? So, that was kind of a tricky food styling. However, that person was not my family. That person was somebody in our community, so it would bring the community in and all the people that person knew. So, you do involve the community like that. A couple of things we did, we did a kids' cooking contest every summer and a program, and we had kids cook things for ten weeks. They got a certificate and something else, I can't remember, at the end of the ten weeks. But we tried to do things that weren't just sweet, and we tried to teach them some principles, and knowing that we would do this with homes—and we would go to a different person who was participating in this every week and photograph them while they did whatever they were making. I had already my sons test each recipe. So, that was an interactive thing with the community. Another thing that we did for twenty years at the *Statesman* was the Christmas cooking contest. And we asked people to send in recipes in designated categories; maybe we would have a cookies category, maybe we would have an entrees

category. We always had an ethnic category. Austin, when we got here, was predominantly—and this would have been in the very late [19]70s—was predominantly, we had a lot of government, state government, because we were the capitol city, federal government, there were IRS offices and other federal groups here. You had University of Texas, big influence in the city. There's several colleges now; I think there's maybe a hundred thousand students in our kind of area, metro area. So, it had a lot of college influence. The University of Texas brought in a lot of ethnic students, and so we had a diversity. I mean, there was a diversity anyway, but they would bring in greater diversity. Anytime you have a city with a university in it, the diversity, I think, is greater. And that is a good thing. So, we had a wide variety of people that we were writing for and trying to include in what we were doing. So, when we would do this annual Christmas cooking contest, we always had an ethnic division, because that's how we would meet some fabulous people and different people, and that was a wonderful, wonderful thing. This was a very popular thing. We did it; it was a lot of work, but we would choose a winner in each category, and we would go to their homes and we would photograph it. We would take props with us 'cause we wanted it to look like Christmas. And for a period of, I don't know, two or three weeks, I would drive around with my station wagon filled with props in the back so that, when we got to somebody's house to photograph, we could kind of make it look festive if they did not have anything. There was one time I stopped at a grocery store to pick something up and the bag boy went out with me to put it in the car. He saw all these props and bags of things in the truck or back of my car, and he says, "Ma'am, have you been home since the last time you were here?" I said, "It looks like I haven't, doesn't it? It looks like I live out of my car." But during that few weeks, I almost did. We went to one winner's house one day and it was a dip that had won an appetizers category, and it was a good dip. It was a fondue-type thing. She and her husband had made it the night before for the picture. And they took a bite and it was really good, and they had another bite. And they had another bite. And by the time I got there to photograph the next day, there was maybe an inch left in the fondue pot, so we had to carefully photograph—dip some bread on a fondue fork and dip it in and let it drip down instead of showing a big pot full of fondue. So, these were ordinary people, you know?

So, you had to work with—you weren't working with food professionals and food stylists. But we wanted to make it festive and it was cute; it was fine. It turned out great.

[00:26:35.14]

Annemarie N.: That's great. What were the challenges of learning how to food style?

[00:26:39.20]

Kitty C.: You know, there are a lot of challenges. I have a box that was, a friend of mine got a fish tackle box, and I turned it into a food styling kit. One of my artist friends painted little carrots all over it, it's bright red. But we did not do—we did realistic styling. We did not use mashed potatoes for ice cream. We might spray a little water on something to make it glisten. We did not use Elmer's glue for milk or things. Commercial food styling sometimes does that, but we were in Austin, Texas, and Austin, Texas likes it real. So, we used that approach. But we did carry chopsticks and all sorts of things to prop things up if we needed to. When we were doing a food shoot, I would have all sorts of plates and napkins, all sorts of claws and little things to tuck in or just add a bit of color or try to help some of their raw ingredients, there were lots of things like that. There was one day we were doing—matter of fact, it was for Valentine's. We had some champagne glasses that we had made some raspberry and white chocolate mousse parfaits for Valentine's Day. I built them here, I was at my house. I was very proud of them, and I put them in a cooler. I put a few extra things in it, just if I needed to touch something up, and took it to work for the photoshoot. And somebody slammed on their brakes in front of me en route, and I had to stop abruptly, and I flipped the cooler. That ruined all those things. So, fortunately, I had enough extras that I rebuilt one at the photoshoot, and that worked. But you run into things like that. We also learned fairly early in the game not to let anybody eat the food until you had seen the film. In those days, we were looking at film. Once we'd seen the film and everybody'd signed off on the film, then we could let the newsroom have at it. But other than that, we got caught sometimes when somebody said, "Oh, I don't like this," and so the food was gone and we had to change, try to adapt that a little bit.

[00:28:51.24]

Annemarie N.: That sounds really challenging. Could you talk a little bit too about recipe testing? Did you have a kitchen at the *Statesman*?

[00:29:01.17]

Kitty C.: I had a photo kitchen at the *Statesman*. So, it was not fully equipped, like with mixers and blenders and things, but it was—I could use it for prep. It was skinny and I didn't have it when I first started, but I did when we moved into a new building. We used it when we were doing a photoshoot, but the testing, primarily, was done at my house. The way I had it worked out, I had a family I was feeding, so I would try to incorporate whatever I was doing in my meal planning. If it was something we were doing a story on that they wouldn't eat, I'd turn in the receipt, take all the food to the paper, and they would eat it later. Otherwise, I would absorb it into my food budget. If we were doing a story on Texas chili, I might cook three or four kinds of chili here during the week. I had a pretty agreeable family. They would give me their opinions. Anything over a five was permission for me to make it again. But when pinto bean pie won the Texas State Fair, I thought, I can't run this recipe without making it. That's just too unusual. So, I would make it and they would give me their input. When purple potatoes came into being, or suddenly became popular in this country, I cooked them one night. I'll never forget, my husband's an engineer, and he was looking at them, and he said, "What's this?" I says, "It's purple potatoes." He says, "Where'd you get 'em?" I said, "I got 'em at the store." "Where'd they come from?" "They came from Peru, they're an ancient heirloom variety." "How long have you had 'em?" [Laughter] So, I wrote my column just like that on it. All the science and engineer people loved it, 'cause that's how they would've responded to it. It was really good having real people help test. So, we'd use that a lot. Sometimes, we would just test things and take 'em to work and let them give feedback. We had a special place where we could taste and test and do that.

[00:30:59.20]

Annemarie N.: That's great. Now, I was talking to Ms. Elaine Corn yesterday, and she kind of was the impetus of trying to get a food section started at the *Statesman*, and she

mentioned that it was difficult because they wanted her to do other things at the same time, and you kind of mentioned that, too.

[00:31:18.20]

Kitty C.: That's right.

[00:31:18.20]

Annemarie N.: Could you talk about the challenges of being a one-person team and what those responsibilities were?

[00:31:24.01]

Kitty C.: I think there are challenges. Elaine may have had greater challenges in that she was doing something else and then she started it. I was brought in as the food person, so I had—but I didn't mind that. I think one thing that we had then, it was started back in 1971 nationally, was the Newspaper Food Editors and Writers Association, it's now known as the Association of Food Journalists. And that was a really great organization. Once again, remember, we didn't have internet, we didn't have email. But with that, we could contact each other in different cities and say, "Okay, how are you solving this problem? Is there a way, or have you encouraged, gotten this problem?" That organization had annual meetings, and we met all around the country each year. So you got regional cuisine, education, as well as you met and talked about some of these different issues. I thought that was a really, really helpful way of dealing with that. Now, then go back to somebody who really wasn't used to allowing, an editor who maybe didn't think something should take a lot of time. You would just have to justify it and say, "Look. This is taking me this much time to do this, and if you want it written with authority, this is what it's going to take." We did not often do single-subject stories. We would do multiple sources and check our things. Elaine, because she initiated it, may have had a greater challenge there than I did on that one. When we started new, other things, sometimes you would have to do your program and justify it, same thing if you were trying to get some travel money and you would have to say, "I can bring back these stories if we do this." I remember one time, a lot of the companies from California started

coming into Austin because of the high tech. I had went out to California on a trip to see what similarities and differences. I found a trip I thought would give me that and I wrote about it, you know, I justified it. I came back with maybe, I don't know, a dozen or more stories. I did a series talking about bridging between the two cities, like the Bay Area and Austin and what we had in common, what we had differences. And we had a major food person who had been in Austin who was then living out in California, and I got her to help me do this. I thought it was very helpful, and it helped explain a lot. It helped people who were moving here understand; it helped people who were living here understand who was coming in. So, I thought that that was a good education for all of us. And that that was a role that we could play. That was not just a recipe thing; it was kind of a newsy thing, and editors like that.

[00:34:19.02]

Annemarie N.: That's great. You've kind of touched on this entire time we've been talkin', but what was your approach to food writing? What kind of angles did you take?

[00:34:32.21]

Kitty C.: I think everything can be a food story. Is it worth the time and effort? You need to think. Are people wanting to know about this? Why am I doing this story on this product or on this person or on this technique or whatever, this subject? So, you need to justify that, and say, "Okay, this is what I'm trying to accomplish with this." Sometimes they can be whimsical, and Austin has a wonderful sense of whimsy. Sometimes they can be whimsical. Sometimes they can be very serious. And you also would be responsive to editorial suggestions. We had an editor who wanted us—and I thought it was a good idea—to track food processing in Texas for a year. This was a big project. We organized four food price—we tried to do a market basket, and we did about thirty items in order to get twenty items, because you can't find the same size bread or orange juice everywhere. And we also specified brands, because we needed to compare national brand prices. And we got some people who were in the food business in four different areas of Texas, and on the same day, we had the same people checking prices for us—each of the four quarters to determine if, was El Paso higher? West Texas higher? Was Dallas higher?

Was Houston higher? Was Austin higher? Interestingly enough, we didn't have all the same grocery stores, lots of different grocery stores in Texas. Texas is big, and we have lots of different regions. That's been fascinating. It's like a country; it's not just a small state. So, interesting enough, there was no one area that was having the same higher every quarter. That was a hard news story. That was, meaning hard—labelled a hard news story—but it was also involved us getting down on our hands and knees in the grocery store, in the aisles, and checking to be sure we're checking the same product and then sending the data in promptly, being sure we were doing it on the same day. But it was good for people to know: okay, it's not higher here always, or it's not higher there always. And it was a good story. Story ideas came from lots of different sources. You just suddenly think that way. You start thinking that way. If a food truck pulled up beside you in a parking lot or—I actually had this happen—pull up beside me in a grocery store, I was at a grocery store, and I start talking to the guy. I thought, "I think I want to do a story on a food truck." This is back before we had a thousand food trucks. And so I got his name and number and then we followed up that way. I thought, "I'm just interested in that. Maybe somebody else is. How does he do that in that little place? Is it hot in there?" You know. "What does he serve? Does he get tired of doing it? Where's the bathroom?" Lots of questions that I might have.

[00:37:25.11]

Annemarie N.: That's great. That's really great. Could you talk a little bit about Austin as kind of like a food scene, and how it's kind of evolved over time?

[00:37:39.18]

Kitty C.: Oh, yes. Absolutely. I love Austin, okay? When I got here, there were basically four food groups here: Tex-Mex, chili—I'm separating that from Tex-Mex—barbecue, and chicken-fried steak. Okay? All of 'em good, I like all of 'em. I still eat all of them. Not as much chicken-fried steak as I used to. And I went to a bakery once and I was talking to one of the food professionals, and I said, "What's the—how many bakers, professional bakers do we have in Austin?" And he said, "Well, in Austin right now, a professional baker is someone who works at Mrs. Johnson's Doughnuts." And I thought, "Okay."

Well, today we have all sorts of really professional bakers who've been to the Culinary Institute, who've had their own bakeries in New York, lots of pastry chefs who've graduated from all sorts of schools. Same thing has happened in food. As Austin has expanded, our palates have expanded. People moving here; high tech has had a lot to do with it. You know, in my family, my husband travelled to Asia quite a bit in his work. I've had a son who's travelled to India quite a bit in his. Comes back loving the Indian food. There's lots of Indian high-tech people who are here, they are looking for their products, they are looking for their restaurants. Those grow up. They spring up. Communities spring up, and suddenly we have a big ethnic center here of foods. And they're good foods, and things that we have not even heard about before, Vietnamese and all of this. Now, we had some of these, but not as prolific as we have them now. So, that's been exciting. Then the grocery stores. We've just had an H. Market store open up, that's a huge, huge thing for Austin to have. Just opened in the last year. So, we have now qualified for that. By the same token, we've had chefs who've come in here and brought in their special ways of doing things. They would maybe start in Dallas and work their way in to Austin, and suddenly spark the palates here. We have, Austin has a lot of smart people. They're travelled people. They have sophisticated palates, so they know some of these foods. They know a lot of these foods. They will frequent these restaurants. You know, I was at a sushi restaurant, Uchiko, on a Thursday night recently this summer, and it was absolutely packed at 6:30. That's not an inexpensive restaurant, but it was beautifully done, and their chef has won—I believe he has a James Beard Award, and we have other chefs who have, Aaron Franklin got a James Beard Award recently for barbecue, in the last year or two, and that's never happened in the James Beard program. We've had chefs who, David Bull, I believe he was named one of the best new chefs, I believe it was by *Food + Wine*. We've had from *Bon Appetit*, it might have been from *Bon Appetit*. We've gotten a lot of national attention because the quality has gotten that good, and they're makin' a name for themselves. And then they maybe open one restaurant, maybe they open another, and people love to come to Austin, and so they frequent these restaurants and they're impressed with what we've got. We've also had some reciprocal, we had an Austin Food + Wine Festival that started over thirty years ago, maybe forty. So, they would bring in chefs from other countries, and they would

share from other states and other cities and they would share knowledge, and so that helped them grow and it helped us grow. The wines, we have a lot of wineries now. That has grown. We've gotten breweries, the beer places, and even some vodka and other liquors are now on our scene. So, we have definitely become a food scene. But when they come in here, they still want to see cowboy hats. You don't see a lot of cowboy hats, you see a lot of baseball caps. And they want to see cowboy boots. You'll see some of those, but you'll also see a lot of sneakers or tennis shoes, because Austin is not like another part of the state. And another thing that's different about Austin, years ago, we had something called Aquafest, and it was a week-long festival down on Town Lake, which is the Colorado River that runs through downtown. Each night was a different ethnic group, and they would do their foods. Even then, that was early on, they were introducing you to Mediterranean food or to Tex-Mex food or to Greek food, whatever they were, whatever night it was. We've always shared that. When guests come in here, a lot of times, they may be looking for the trendy things we're doin', but they may also be looking for the things we're known for. They may be looking for, "Okay, I want to go to a Tex-Mex place. I want to have a taco. I want to go to a food truck. I want to have barbecue. I want to, you know, have some things that are basics." You and I are that way. If we go to Maine, we're going to eat some lobster, you know? So, I respect what they're doing. There's always been some Southern food here in Austin. I was looking and thinking about, where did I used to go? When I came here, I was from the South, so you can be sure that I was kind of looking for some Southern food after I got here. A lot of times, it was in the cafeterias I had it. There was this wonderful old home down in South Austin called Green Pastures, and they did a lot of luncheons and weddings and dinners, and they had—it was a restaurant that had grown out of a family, and it was elegant. So, they were known for that. But it was interesting to me that we had retained a few places. Threadgill's is another one, the music scene as well as the food scene. The owner there, Eddie Wilson, his mama was from Mississippi, so he cooked what she cooked and he still does. There were places like Catfish Parlour's still been in business, kind of a fish place. There was a place called Dot's Place and she had wonderful, hand, with rolls and others foods. People knew what days in town they could get chicken and dumplings, they would go to certain restaurants on certain days to get those. You might not be able to get 'em

every day, but they would know, Thursday's chicken and dumpling at such-and-such a place, and they would know where to go there. Sam's Bar-B-Que over in East Austin was begun, I think, in [19]57, it's still in business. Hoover Alexander, guy at Hoover's Cooking, just does great service. Picnic tables inside his place, the old meatloafs and Southern food. You will find what some people call home cooking in those places. But people are also looking for the newer things that they want, or the things that they think should be Texas. Sometimes, when people come to Texas and they go to Dallas, they really want it to look more Texas-y than it does. If they go to Fort Worth, Fort Worth looks more like the Texas, especially if you go to downtown to Fort Worth, more like Texas that they're wanting.

[00:45:02.14]

Annemarie N.: That's really great. Let me see. Well, I have a question. What are some of, maybe, columns or articles you wrote that were really significant that stand out in your career here?

[00:45:22.09]

Kitty C.: Well, there have been several. The one that's probably the biggest was the one I wrote about, cooking for my mother when she was dying. It's the one that won a James Beard Award and it won the M.F.K. Fisher Award, it was a finalist for a Bert Greene Award and a number of other things. In that, I reflected on what she had been, the influence she had been in my life. And helping me get into the career that I have been in, because she was such a pivotal person in guiding me in that direction. It's been something that I absolutely loved. I loved going to work. I loved doing what I did. It was interesting to me, and I still enjoy it. A lot of people said, "Oh, I wish I loved my job that much." Well, these combined my interests, and I've been able to make it work with a family, so I've loved doing that. I was always grateful for that. I have the—one of the columns I wrote about once was tamales. A lot of people in Texas, Central Texas, they'll make tamales and have them all during the holidays, especially on Christmas Eve and other things. If you've got a big family willing to do that and have a *tamalada*, you know, that's fun, but it's also a lot of work. So, we used to try to find out places we could get good tamales and

then we would bring them into our homes. Today, we have our own—every Christmas Eve, we have tamales. It's a tradition we've been doing ever since we've been in Texas. Didn't do that when we lived in the South. When we lived in the South, the only tamales we'd ever had came out of a can and they had pieces of paper between them at that time. But we love tamales. So, we would always start gettin' our tamale orders in, figuring out our tamales. Well, my hairdresser's son was going to school outside Austin, and he had a good tamale source. So my hairdresser says, "I'll have him bring your tamales." I said, "Okay, I want this many." Well, after finals, he came back to town and he forgot the tamales. And he called me, he says, "Okay, dear, I'm so sorry, but I don't have your tamales." I said, "What?!" You know? "This is horrible!" And it's kind of late to be placing orders for tamales. We're talking almost Christmas Eve. I said, "We've got to find me some tamales." So we didn't have social media then, or we could have done this a lot faster, but I wrote a story on my trying to find tamales and then when I finally, he found me some. My hairdresser left his business that he owned and met me in a parking lot in his red truck and we did our tamale deal, and it was really funny. So, we wrote about it as my tamale deal goin' down. But it showed how important a custom can be, it was to our family, it was to his family. He knew what that loss was, and there might have been more places that, had I had more notice, I could have gotten tamales real fast that I really wanted. Yes, you can go to the grocery store and get pre-packaged, but I was lookin' for some extra special tamales. So, that has been a fun one. Another story that I did, had a lot of fun doing, was interesting to me, I spent a night in the kitchen of the Four Seasons hotel. And the Four Seasons hotel was like a five-ring circus, because that particular kitchen did everything. They did the dining room, they did the parties going on, they did room service, they did any special wedding or thing out on the patio. They were doing all the foods that were in the hotel. So, all the different orders—say, why, this is not a huge kitchen. And I just wrote about a Saturday night in that kitchen, and it was really interesting. It won a first place, I think, at Association of Food Journalists Award. I learned a lot from that. I did another story on barbecue where I went, how to lighten up barbecue. Is there a way to cut the fat in the regular barbecue meal? That won an award. I did a story on the Centex six, and I had, like first of the year I had six people in Central Texas who wanted to lose weight, and I paired each one with a dietician. We followed

them for six months, and then we wrote about how their lives had changed and who stayed on, who didn't, what worked. When somebody would run in and bought a prom dress a different size they'd never bought, and how excited they were. We won a national award for that one, as well. So, that was rewarding, and also encouraging to other people, how you can do some things like that. That was kind of a fun story. One of the stories . . . Thanksgiving is the Super Bowl of food. So, you have to do a Thanksgiving story every year. You have to do that. So, trying to come up with a little bit of a different way to do a Thanksgiving story every year is a bit of a challenge. So, we would address that in our annual food editor conferences, and here's a new way. So, if we were meeting in New Orleans, that's where they introduced it. That's where I first learned to fry a turkey. So, then I came back and wrote about how to fry a turkey without settin' your house on fire. So, that was a good way of learning new ways to do that. One year, when we were having such a heavy influx of newcomers, I went to the welcome—newcomer's club, and I picked out ten people. I said, "Would you come to my house for Thanksgiving dinner? Bring a dish you would bring." And we wrote about each of them. We were all strangers. What they would have on Thanksgiving. We wrote about that. Another year we did it from a high-tech perspective, like if you're not going to leave the office, what can you have shipped in to your office? And we ordered everything online, and that was kind of different. We've done smoked turkeys, we've done all different dressings. We've done, this Southern restaurant I was telling you about, it was in the house. We did her dressing recipe one year, and she had a fabulous one. We wrote about it. Then we did another place that had dressing that had, another year a stuffing or dressing that had six kinds of corn in it, called corn in six ways. That has been a blowaway favorite, and I have now switched to that dressing or stuffing for Thanksgiving, that's good. Another year, somebody called me from the beauty shop and said, "We're havin' a fight here at the beauty shop." I said, "What's goin' on?" "We're arguing over, is it stuffing or dressing, and what's the best kind? So, we have decided that next Thursday, we're all going to bring our stuffings and dressings, and we're going to just see who's got the best one." I said, "I'll be there." So, we wrote about stuffing wars, and that was a fun way of doing. You're acknowledging that you're doing it with a little different spin. Once again, how to help people. Let's say you're takin' food to Grandmother's house, or somebody's house.

How do you do this safely? What can you do that's safe? We would write about that, and what are some good foods that travel well? Right before I retired from the *Statesman*, I took early retirement because my husband was retiring for, like, the third time. [Laughter] I wrote about, I had made a pecan pie and it had stuck. I had used one of these crust-your-own that's in a box, and it stuck, so I made another one and it stuck. So I said, "Is anybody else having a problem?" Well, I heard from hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of cooks in Central Texas. "We thought it was us! We thought it was us!" So then I try to track to the manufacturers, what's changed? Foods have had trans fats eliminated, we've had —Why? My other pies weren't stickin'. What is it about pecan pie that's makin' it stick that didn't used to stick. How can we, how can we fix this? I think the manufacturer had changed, modified that dough a little bit. They never came out and said—they said, "We really value our Texas customers. We really value the pecan pie, but the others are not having trouble." I said, "Are you hear—we're not having trouble with anything except pecan pie." So, never got a strong here's how to do it from them, but we went back and started playing with some things, and readers, I said, "Readers, what are you doing?" So we tried all the things. I took in a pecan pie every day to work, and we tested. We came up with some things that we thought were actually helping. And this was all happening right at the time I was packin' up my desk. And I'd given a notice date I was trying, and my editor said, "You can't leave until you get this pecan pie thing straightened out." And I really, really didn't have time to deal with it at that time. But you did, because that's wonderful consumer interaction, you know? That's reader interaction which you want. I think we came up with some solutions that helped people, and that was just something people were having trouble with, so it was a sharing. We would do that on Facebook now and come up with how to solve that. But anyway, that was one that I thought was a lot of fun. Interesting, not just a lot of fun. I have been blessed in that I had the chance to interview a lot of celebrities: James Beard, I did a lunch with Julia Child, I interviewed her over lunch and I won a national award for that story. Craig Claiborne, who was the *New York Times'* restaurant critic. I've had a lot of coverage. I've judged a lot of contests, chicken contests and beef contests. This is a beef state, this is a chicken state. I've judged ribs championships. I've gone and hung out at all sorts of rib fests just to talk to different ones and learn tricks, and how do you do this and how do you do that.

Chili cook-offs. The thing I learned on chili cook-offs is that, pretty much now if I judge a chili cook-off, I insist on doing the finals, 'cause sometimes those are early entrance. You're not sure what all's in those, or they may be really hot. I've judged salsa contests. I've found that to be very helpful. Once again, it's good interaction. When we would have an opportunity to go tour something. I've toured slaughter plants in West Texas, and that's eye opening, but it's real. I think it's important to share that; it's important for me to know that. I've been through chicken processing plants. Not very appetizing, but it's important for me to know how our food is processed, how it's grown. I've been to crawfish farms, didn't know that I needed to know that knowledge, but I do now. And it was interesting. So, I've had the opportunity to go to cranberry bogs. I've had an opportunity to share all of this with our readers. I've had an opportunity to go through a big salsa plant in San Antonio, and to my surprise, I cried all the way through it. It was the peppers and the onions, just the vapor or whatever's in the air. So, my eyes were particularly sensitive to it, I guess. I cry when I peel an onion. So that was, I thought, "Wow. I hadn't thought about that." This is was a favorite salsa here in Texas, and so I was able to tell people what this was like, how many pounds they were doin', what the process was like, what they were doing. At one point in Austin, I counted and we had fifty local salsas being made, so we talked about that phenom, and who were the people behind these salsas. Some of these were not food people. They might have been a musician or they might have been a barber. They had lots of different occupations. How did they get into this business? Austin has been a very entrepreneurial city. Whole Foods has been wonderful about letting people introduce a product there. Central Market has been, too, but Whole Foods was a wonderful. And some of the other, the co-ops have been great about letting people try their product out on the public. Because of that, we've had a number of products created here that have won national awards. So, we have always written about them, because this is where people help each other. They try to, if they've got a good product and a quality product, they'll try to help you learn your way, find your way. So we've worked a lot with, how do you get a product on the market? Because a lot of people have those interests. So we've enjoyed those stories and thought those were beneficial. We talked about how athletes, we've done stories on how athletes eat. It may be the University of Texas, it may be—I've had dinner with both the Dallas Cowboys and

the Houston Oilers, or they were the Oilers then—and we talked about what they were doin' and how they eat and how they go about their food program. We did a story that won a national award on the life, how women should eat through their life cycles, as in when they're teenagers, when they're maybe college kids and then maybe if they're pregnant or in older age. How do those needs change? It's kind of interesting, I was interviewing a UT student for that, and I said, "So how do you handle fine dining?" And she said, "Define fine dining." I said, "Well, you define fine dining." She says, "If I use a fork." And I thought, "Okay. I need to know that that's where you're coming from, because that impacts me in writing for you." Of course, we know today that a lot of people, they rarely use a fork. We're such a hands society, and we eat so much in our cars and standin' up and everywhere else. Food is designed for mobility. So that's a change. All these changes have made the food field continue to be interesting. And so, I have just been fascinated by all of that. The diets, oh, my goodness, that's what we've seen. When you go low-fat, high-fat, no carbs, high carbs. So many different diets have been out there. Gluten free, that's a huge diet impact right now. Keto—lots of things that people are doing that impact their shopping, that impact stores. How to shop a grocery store, save money, don't go hungry. You know? Don't ever go to the grocery store hungry, that's the first thing you shouldn't do. Shop the perimeters. You know, we know those things. I think, in some ways, that's why people are orderin' food delivered, that keeps them from tempting to spend other money or to impulse purchases. Lots of factors in all of this.

[01:00:08.15]

Annemarie N.: That's great. You were talkin' earlier, too, about the Association of Food Journalists. Could you talk about that and the kind of relationships that you built during some of those conventions and then, also, maybe just some of the relationships you had with food journalists, either men or women, throughout the United States or Texas?

[01:00:28.25]

Kitty C.: I would say that has been—the Association of Food Journalists—has been a huge factor in my life, in forming those relationships. If you're doing a story on Super Bowl food and let's say Pittsburgh Steelers are maybe in the playoffs, you call up your good

friend that's in Pittsburgh and say, "What's your sandwich that everybody eats?" Find out it's something called, I think, the Primanti that has French fries inside it, and so you can work those resources because you know those people. You can call somebody up and say, "Okay, we're havin' an argument. If I'm going to do a gumbo for something, what kind of gumbo? How dark does my roux have to be?" We formed those relationships sitting around tables working together at conferences, and that has been a big factor. The Texas food editors during these last, roughly, the thirty years when I was food editor, we all got to know each other at state conferences, state chicken cooking contests or at other events. So, San Antonio, Dallas, Austin, and Houston, we got to know one another well. So, every time we would have one of these national contests, we would have one night where we would go out to dinner together, the Texas food editors go out to dinner together, and keep—"What do you know? What's happening? What do I need to know in your city? What do I need to know?" When we would have the Austin Food + Wine Festival, most of them would come to that. "Okay, how can we share knowledge? What kind of knowledge can we do?" You have to remember, too, we're also competitors. So you work both sides of that. I worked for a Cox newspaper. We had other newspapers in our chain. We would do the same thing at the conference. I would have one dinner or meet lunch with the Cox other food editors that were there from Cox, and then often, we would share story info and share it with each other to help cover more things. It was, been a tremendous resource. Or if you have readers fussing about something and you're not quite sure how to solve it with your resources, "Has anybody else done this?" You know. When newspapers started going online, "Who's putting the newspapers online? How do you get the newspapers online? How do you find the back issues? Readers want the back issues, the old recipes. How do you find what they're tryin' to find? Is there a way to handle this better? I've got fifty, I've got five hundred cookbooks stacked on my desk. How do I go through? How do you handle the things you don't need, you don't sell?" One thing that I learned from Seattle, they had an annual sale around Christmas time. Anything that had come in, they would sell and the money would go to charity, and it'd go to a different charity every year. Just practical little things that we would use. But it was so helpful to have a directory that we could pick up the phone and call and we could say, and they would usually call you back. And it might not just be that. It might be

if you were doin' a special story on something. I did a story on a chefs' cooking disasters once, and I checked with chefs around the country. I didn't just do the ones here. So, that was helpful to be able to—okay, who will play along with this? Who will make this a good story? Part of it's just an interesting read. We also have done that with our local readers, and they had done some interesting things, including putting their golf balls in the microwave oven to try to make 'em go farther on field, golf course. It did, till a certain point. Then it blew up. [Laughter]

[01:04:05.26]

Annemarie N.: Oh, wow. That's funny. So, let's see. I guess I have two big questions to ask you now.

[01:04:24.19]

Kitty C.: Okay.

[01:04:24.19]

Annemarie N.: One is, what's your greatest personal achievement in your career? And it can be personal, like an inward growth thing, or like something that's kind of tangible that you've produced.

[01:04:37.26]

Kitty C.: People would say that winning a James Beard Award, a food writing award, would probably be the biggest one, and I would tend to agree with that. I would say that my achievement is that I feel like I've had a fascinating career, and I've been able to juggle a family, a husband and children, and I now have grandchildren. And I've been able to juggle that. I was able to do that with this job. What my mother planned worked, you know? But I've absolutely loved what I've done. And I've had people ask me, "So, what's it like to have the job everybody wants?" And I said, "It's pretty good. It's pretty darn good." So, I've just enjoyed, I've been challenged by it, I've enjoyed doing it. I feel like I have grown, I feel like I have not solved cancer, you know, I have not done that, and I lamented that once to somebody. I said, "Well, I didn't find a cure for cancer." And they

said, "No, but you helped me through my life at a time I needed help. You helped me get my kids off to school. You helped me feed my family. You have done more than you know." And I said, "Well, thank you for that. I hope that I've done it responsibly, I have tried to. I've just been blessed to be able to have this job." I started to say, I've been lucky—I got chewed out by a teacher when I was a senior in high school, she said, "Luck is being prepared when opportunity knocks." Well, I had a journalism minor and a food, or a home economics, major, and those two put together every time I wanted to do something. Those two, that combination opened the door. So, you can get the door open, but then you have to work hard and not coast. You know? You have to be willing to try new things, new ideas, and there've been lots of changes in the way we do things, from Selectric typewriters all the way to computers and hot type to things being done and shipped off electronically. There's been a lot of change, and I can remember having been a part of all of that. I've loved it. I loved being in the newsroom in downtown Austin. Austin is a vibrant, growing city. I love being in the heartbeat of a city that I loved. I loved meeting and getting to know so many people in Austin. I feel like people who are interested in food, a lot of them are nurturers. So, I've gotten to meet people of all cultures all over Central Texas, and I've driven all over Central Texas. I had Mighty Maps in my car before we had Garmins and GPSes on our phones. I really liked getting to know this area, and I think that's why, one of the reasons I love it so much, because I know how many good people that I've met over the years, and I know what the heartbeat of Austin is. So, that has been an extra bonus. I didn't go out to do that, but it's been an extra bonus.

[01:08:08.20]

Annemarie N.: That's awesome. What you just said made me think of something else. What was the overall kind of environment of the newsroom at the *Statesman*?

[01:08:23.09]

Kitty C.: I liked the newsrooms at the *Statesman*. It was an open pod, basically it was open pod. So, features was right—you know, I sat right next to cop reporters and sports reporters and business reporters and arts. We were in the middle of the newsroom for much of the

time and elsewhere. We worked together as a newsroom. Features wasn't on a third floor somewhere and everybody else on another. Big, big papers, sometimes that's the case. We all worked together, and when we had major news events, like major news events, if there was a flood, we would all pitch in, answer phones, do whatever was needed. They would come out and say, "You're gonna do this, you're gonna do this, you're gonna do this." So, I think it was a collaborative. It was expected and I think we did it well together. The day that I remember, I remember some days very graphically. I remember the day of 9/11, and my job that day was to check all the wire services, all the time, for the different locations where the planes had gone down and try to get a body count. That was my job. That is a tough job, and it was hard to get accurate information. But every hour, I was to give them a count. Okay, here's what we're seein' in Pennsylvania, here's what we're seein' in D.C., here's what we're seein' in New York to try to keep that total going. Meanwhile, during that day, we were hearing that perhaps the state capitol was going to be attacked, our Texas state capitol, which we could see. We could see it from our newsroom window. So, there was the angst of, is this somebody, is something going to hit here? We didn't, the nation didn't know what was going to happen then. And so we were working a news story, and everybody is on hand. Whatever you'd planned to do, you had to change this, and everybody would—I loved that about a mid-size newspaper. We could learn from each other. We could ask hard news reporters things, they could ask us things. We could learn from each other and we collaborated, and I thought that was really good. We worked as a team, and we didn't—it wasn't competitive and contentious. We worked as a team. I worked primarily days. I didn't work the night shift. But I felt like it was pretty much a collaborative effort in the *Statesman* newsroom during the thirty years I was there. Almost thirty years I was there.

[01:10:58.15]
Annemarie N.: That's great. That's a long time.

[01:11:01.04]
Kitty C.: Yes, it is.

[01:11:01.04]

Annemarie N.: Quite a career. So, after thirty years—here, and then more years in Huntsville and other places—what do you hope to see for the future of food journalism?

[01:11:15.16]

Kitty C.: I don't know what's gonna happen in food journalism, and I don't know—can I trust what somebody is telling me, is a question I have. Newspapers have taken pride in, we have done the research for you, we have checked this out with multiple sources, you can trust what we're printing or producing online. I put in some words the other day on a search and I got a blog or something popped up and I thought, "I don't know whether to trust this person or not. Do they know what they're doing? Are they on the take? Is somebody paying them for these hits? Did somebody give them a product and ask them to review it?" To me, that is of a concern. So, the future is, how do we keep it accurate? How do we keep it trustworthy? I still like a paper paper, but I do realize how fast the news can come in and how fast the news can go out these days with electronics and digital. You can get a tweet about it or a text about it, and suddenly you're not waiting until in the morning to learn about something. I think that we are going to continue to kind of help one another, trying to resource things and find things. I think we're going to try to help each other probably with specific needs, maybe dietary needs, say, "Is anybody trying this? Is it working for you?" I think that, I don't know that paper newspapers, hard copy, is going to be able to sustain because of cost. When I started with newspapers, they had classified ads. Classified ads were a heavy, a definite presence, and you could count on 'em, but there was no Craigslist. There was no eBay. And people have alternate ways of selling something or finding something now, and it's wiped out classified ads, by and large. There was no internet, and there was no social media sayin', "Where do I find a good doctor? Where do I find, or how do I solve this?" I think, and there was no Food Network. If you want to know how to cook a turkey, there was a Butterball hot line, and there was your food editor telling you how to do it, and maybe a magazine or two. Now, just about everybody wants to tell you how to cook a turkey in some form. So, I would look to the Poynter Institute or somebody to say, "What do you really think the future of this can be?" I think, for a newspaper to continue to report on its

local, that's what we can do that somebody writing a blog in California can't do. That's what we get, is to make things local, and help people find and navigate their way in the area in which they are. I think that will be a way of helping. I think it's an unknown, an unknown future. People don't always care about food. People love to talk about food. My husband was often amazed. He says, "People talk to you all the time." I say, "It's because I do food beat, and everybody has an opinion on food." And so they, it's something they can talk about. I said, "I can't talk to a brain surgeon. I can't talk to a rocket scientist. But I can talk to a food person. Food people can talk to me." So I said, it's a topic everybody usually has an opinion on, and it's something that's relevant to everybody's life, and I think it still will be. I'm thinkin' we're goin' to see multimedia ways of reaching that. We're going to maybe see some things disappear that we didn't think would disappear. I know a number of my colleagues either got laid off or they've gone down to not producing every day, printing every day, and that's hard to see. It was a good industry. A friend of mine got on an airplane recently in London and she got so excited. She said, "When I got on, they said, 'Do you want a newspaper?' They had a stack of newspaper." She said, "I grabbed every one of 'em and read 'em all during the flight. I love that." So I think people do miss that, but the cost of newspapers has gone up, and so I think that it's . . . will it sustain? I don't know, I don't know.

[01:15:49.01]

Annemarie N.: That's great. I don't have any more questions for you, but do you have anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about?

[01:15:56.10]

Kitty C.: I was going to mention just two or three notes that I had jotted down when I was thinkin' about . . . you know, we've had six flags fly over Texas, and so we've had a lot of food influences that those different flags have represented. You know, there's Spain and France and Mexico and Republic of Texas, the Confederate States flag, that was the South, and we've had all of those influences. You think about how many different foods—there are a lot more foods influencing Texas but, as we mentioned, Texas is a big state. You will find different focus as you go around the state. But we haven't talked

about German and Czech food, and those are huge in Central Texas. The barbecuing and then the sausage making and the smoking, those are really, really big, and they've been big since as long as I've been here. I didn't know, I never knew about the Czech influence until I got here and my first *kolache*, which is a sweet roll with some sort of filling in center of it. They are just wonderful. And now, they've been adapted, and they've been rolled in sausages, and some people say that's not a real *kolache*, but people—I have a guy who's a *kolache* maker, and he's got some of them that have bacon in them now, and some that have meatballs in 'em, we've seen those change and morph as society has become handheld. It's our food eating has become let's eat with one hand and drive with the other. So, it's been amazing to see all these different influences that are there. Then fajitas, I have to talk about fajitas. I was here when fajitas kind of become a big thing. The fajita is a diaphragm muscle of a cow, and it's beef, and there are purists who think that is the only fajita that there is. Now, if you've been to any restaurant, you know they offer you chicken fajitas. Well, a chicken doesn't have a diaphragm muscle, but they have cut chicken into strips and the fajita has become more than just the meat, it's become the meat and the grilled vegetables and then all the toppings. That is everywhere now; all over the country. So, we have seen how that phenom has just soared and how it's changed. I've eaten rattlesnake fajitas at events, and a rattlesnake doesn't have a diaphragm muscle. I probably wouldn't specifically order rattlesnake fajitas, although you're in Texas and you're a food editor, you try those things. But I've seen the fajita phenom. The breakfast taco, we haven't talked about the breakfast taco. Huge, huge, huge in Austin. When I first got here, not as big. But now, it's everything goes into a breakfast taco, everybody has a breakfast taco, it's kind of our breakfast food—once again, handheld, you can eat it and go. It's very, very big. So, all of these things are the different cultural events that we got. Things in a bowl, Asian influence of eatin' meals in a bowl. We're seein' that so big now. We're seein' it in the grocery stores as well as all these restaurants offering bowls for lunch. And I love how multicultural we are with this. We can get those things right here. And I can remember being at a food conference in Seattle and eating some wonderful apples, and I came home, Whole Foods already had them in their store. I just went, "Wow. That is great that we are so responsive on that." And by the same token, we have these heirloom varieties that are not trucked across the country and

that are so good, all these tomatoes and other heirloom things that are foods and vegetables that are just fabulous. So, we have access to that. And this whole organic and eating local movement, we didn't address that, but that's been big. A story I did once, I tried to eat locally for a week. Three or four of us on the staff did it. Somebody said, "I'm goin' to do it when I can." Somebody said, "I'm goin' to try do it, but I'm eatin' out a lot." And I said, "I'm going to do it." But it really cut into my social life to try to eat exclusively local. Couldn't find any sugar that I knew was just in our local area, and it was a very hard exercise. And I made bread every day. I did find some flour. But I was cooking maybe twenty-one meals that week, and that was a big change in my life, to do that as well. But it—we're continuing to get more foods local. We are not as agricultural a county as some others are. It's the soil. We have a lot of limestone. But we do have a lot of farmer's markets, and people come in from outside Travis County and sell. But that's important for us, because should we have any natural, national disruptions of our food supply, what can we sustain ourselves with locally? I think that's just important to know. That was a really good exercise for us to have and for us to do. Also living here in Central Texas and living in Austin, our papers has been able to do things on the governors, what the governors eat, the governor's mansion, what they feed when his special visitors come, how did they cook when Prince Charles came or somebody came. So, that's been a fun or interesting way of utilizing something local and doing a food story around them when they come, and what are you feeding somebody from England when they're of a royal nature or when they're honoring someone for a food thing. We have been able to be a part of that and report on that. And so have other papers in Texas. We've also covered a number of other events that we thought would have interest to people and how it was chosen, or how something was done. One thing about judging a national contest, sometimes you eat the winner and you think, "This won?" Well, you need to look at the score card. You have to go by the score card. And it may be, does it contain chocolate? It's not going to say that. It's going to say, does it look like—it might say, does it look like something you would want to eat? Does it taste like you thought it was? Does it feature the product, if it's a beef contest, do you see beef first or is it just a little tiny bit of beef in it, you need to know how something is scored when you make, what the score card or criteria is before you say, "Well, I don't understand this." That's

been something that people have found very interesting, and that a bunch of these contests are very, very strictly run, almost like a jury in deliberation where you're escorted to the bathroom. I have been escorted to the bathroom in judging these, and you're kept in a quarantine, and there's a lawyer and other people in the room of the major judging to keep everything very accurately, so you're not influenced in any way. So, the ones I have, so I can say they've been very fairly run, and I applaud that. So, that's been an interesting thing. Been a fair amount of travel in this job, and I have loved getting to know that, explore that. I did not take a junior year abroad. I got married. So, I think it's a great, it's been a great ride. [Laughter] A great time at the table.

[01:23:52.17]
Annemarie N.: That's great. Well, thank you so much.

[01:23:54.13]
Kitty C.: Sure. Now, let me just talk to you informally—
[*End of interview*]