



**William Barnhardt  
Willaby's Café  
White Stone, Virginia**

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Location: Willaby's Café  
Interviewer: Jessica Taylor  
Transcription: Diana Dombrowski  
Length: one hour, thirty-six minutes  
Project: Tidewater Foodways

[*START INTERVIEW*]

JT: This is Jessica Taylor at Willaby's on May 22, 2018. Sir, can you please state your full name?

[00:00:10]

WB: William Barnhardt.

[00:00:13]

JT: Okay. And when and where were you born?

[00:00:14]

WB: I was born in Richmond on July 17, 1964.

[00:00:23]

JT: Okay. And what were your parents' occupations?

[00:00:24.18]

WB: My parents were duck farmers.

[00:00:28]

JT: Okay. Can you talk about growing up at, I guess, the duck farm?

[00:00:37]

WB: Well, it was interesting. I think the one thing that strikes me the most is that we had to have a job during the summer. But whenever it snowed, before we could go sleigh riding, we had to pick up the eggs because, if it snowed and the employees couldn't come in, you still had to pick the eggs up. You couldn't go without doing that. Certain functions had to take place. So, snow days weren't always fun days. [Laughter]

[00:01:08]

JT: Yeah. How did your parents get into duck farming?

[00:01:09]

WB: It was my grandfather, actually, and he tried different—he moved from Charlotte to Urbanna—Charlotte, North Carolina to Urbanna, Virginia—and he tried different types of farming. He tried cotton. He tried pigs. He tried chicken, and then he struck onto ducks, and it worked.

[00:01:30]

JT: Were the previous attempts just not profitable or just not for him, or . . . ?

[00:01:35]

WB: I don't know which, yeah. But it didn't work out for him. But ducks did, and it was a family business for sixty years.

[00:01:46]

JT: And how big of a business was it? Like how many people worked for you?

[00:01:51]

WB: At its peak, we had a hundred and sixty-five employees. We would process seven thousand ducks a day, and that would be in the packages, like you'd see a whole chicken in the store. And then we would do 1.5 million ducks a year. Sometimes we would pick up as many as twenty thousand eggs in a day.

[00:02:12]

JT: Wow. Where were you supplying to with the ducks?

[00:02:17]

WB: Well, the ducks sold—like, three quarters of our inventory would sell during the fall, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Mostly in the Northeast, but all throughout the United States. At one point, we packed under twenty-five different labels, like A&P and Safeway, as well as some other duck farms would have us package under their labels. Yeah, especially farms in Long Island, where they get more per pound for their duck, so it was worthwhile for them to have us pack under their label.

[00:02:53]

JT: Wow. What was the relationship like between your parents' duck farm and—was it in Urbanna, or—the Urbanna community?

[00:03:03]

WB: It was just outside of Urbanna. It was actually behind Rosegill Farms, so it was about a mile and a half to get to Urbanna. The relationship? Well, with a hundred and sixty-five people in the rural community, there were a lot of people that were employed there. Some of the local restaurants carried our duck, and they were in the local grocery stores.

[00:03:32]

JT: Okay. With economic fluctuations, did that affect your parents at all?

[00:03:35]

WB: Yeah. Well, the move of agriculture is to a smaller number of larger players, and given our location, the dynamics just weren't in place for us to be bigger. The farms that work now are closer to the Grain Belt, so it's easier to get the grain that they need to feed the ducks, and they're also a little further north, because the heat can really take a toll on ducks. Ducks prefer cooler weather. So, the bigger farms are in Canada and Wisconsin and Indiana.

[00:04:20]

JT: Okay.

[00:04:22]

WB: Yeah.

[00:04:24]

JT: And you said you were supplying primarily to the Northeast. Is there a reason for that beyond there's more supermarkets up there?

[00:04:29]

WB: Cultural. That there's a lot of demand for duck in Chinese markets, and you've got Chinatowns in New York City and Baltimore. That drove it. It's more cultural, that there was more consumption of duck in the Northeast, based on the cultural mix of the Northeast more than there would be in the Southeast.

[00:05:01]

JT: Yeah, yeah. So, what did your parents cook at home?

[00:05:07]

WB: I remember my mom's chili, and I remember her oyster stew. I remember my father grilling fish outside on the grill. We had duck once a month. [Laughter]

[00:05:27]

JT: That's fair, yeah. [Laughter]

[00:05:27]

WB: And it worked out. I never got tired of it. Duck's delicious.

[00:05:31]

JT: Okay. What made your mom's chili so special?

[00:05:34]

WB: That's a good question. I think the mix of beans, the variety of seasoning, the chunks of tomatoes, are what I remember. We kept that recipe and we serve it in here now. Yeah. So, that and we do my mom's oyster stew, same recipe, and serve it in here now. They're both popular items. So, that worked out.

[00:06:04]

JT: Can you describe those recipes a little more?

[00:06:05]

WB: Our chili has got twenty-two different ingredients, so it takes a while to put together and it takes a while to compose. You really need to keep it simmering on the stove for a day before you serve it. The oyster stew has got a really unique flavor. We like to add the oysters, cook them and add them to order, so that they don't get smaller while you keep the soup kettle hot.

[00:06:35]

JT: Oh, okay. Okay.

[00:06:35]

WB: Yeah, it keeps oysters plump.

[00:06:38]

JT: What kind of broth was in the—was it a broth stew, the oyster stew?

[00:06:40]

WB: Mm-hm, yeah. It's cream-based, yeah.

[00:06:47]

JT: Okay. I don't want to divulge any of your secrets. [Laughter] Or anything. However much you tell me—

[00:06:52]

WB: I think one of the things that makes it—I think it's probably hard to pick out that gives that soup a real punch is . . . using hot chili powder, using cayenne chili, using cayenne pepper in the finish of it. Just a tiny little pinch, and it helps. It just brings a brightness to the cream that I think makes it kind of unique.

[00:07:32]

JT: So, at home for holidays, did your parents do anything special food-wise? Desserts or bigger dishes, bigger family gatherings?



[00:07:44]

WB: The thing that I remember the most was pickled watermelon rind.

[00:07:50]

JT: Really?

[00:07:51]

WB: Oh, yeah. I can taste that right now. Yeah, it's delicious. And it's firm, it's a little crunchy. Oh yeah, yeah. That was the thing that I think I looked forward to the most. Spoonbread not so much, not when I was a kid.

[00:08:04]

JT: Really?

[00:08:04]

WB: Yeah, 'cause it's a Southern style, it's not real sweet. Yeah. I think that, and the fried oysters. Yeah.

[00:08:17]

JT: How did your mom make pickled watermelon rind? Do you remember what her process was?

[00:08:23]

WB: I don't remember her process, no, but they're certainly a sweet pickle. And it's . . .  
yeah, that's all that I really know. I've never made those pickles. I should look into it.  
'Cause, now that you mention it, I'm thinkin' how good they taste. [Laughter]

[00:08:42]

JT: Do you remember, for oysters, what she put into the batter she fried them in?

[00:08:47]

WB: Just salt, pepper, flour, some cornmeal.

[00:08:54]

JT: Okay. Where did she get the oysters from?

[00:08:57]

WB: Well, then they would have probably come from Ferguson Oyster Company,  
because my dad and Waverly Ferguson were good friends. So, most likely, they would  
have, at Thanksgiving, traded a duck for a gallon of oysters. Something like that would  
have happened.

[00:09:16]

JT: Uh-huh. Okay.

[00:09:17]

WB: Yeah. At that time, there were a lot of oyster houses up and down the Rappahannock River. Not as many now, but . . .

[00:09:28]

JT: Do you remember the fluctuations in seafood at that time?

[00:09:28]

WB: No.

[00:09:30]

JT: When you were growing up?

[00:09:30]

WB: Uh-uh. I don't remember it, but I wasn't aware of the market. I don't think I was as aware of the market. We always had oysters, yeah. Local people always have oysters.

[00:09:44]

JT: Before we move on from the duck farming and your parents, I wanted to see how the technology of processing duck changed over time, especially as you got bigger.

[00:09:54]

WB: Well, it's interesting, because I've recently seen some video footage that was taken of the area, and I saw the ducks being loaded into a wooden barrel with ice, and I was

aware that that happened when we were young. It would get loaded on to the steam boats and carried up to Baltimore. That's where I think most of the things went that were gathered. That was kind of a central hub for distribution. And I remember as a kid, the old, abandoned processing plant down at the water, and that probably was positioned down at the water because it was closer to load the ducks onto the boat. You know, I remember the shackles there. I remember shackles—I remember the processing line having a lot of steel and it bein' real rusty and, certainly, the one that I grew up with was all stainless. Certainly, that would have changed over time. And we had freezers. We didn't pack ducks in ice. We would freeze them because three-quarters of the inventory would go out all at one time. You would build up that inventory in a freezer the size of a gymnasium. Because 1.5 million ducks is a lot, and you store three-quarters of that for it to zoom out at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

[00:11:31]

JT: Yeah. So, what ultimately made your parents decide to leave that behind? Or is it still in the family?

[00:11:39]

WB: It's not in the family, no. It just . . . it got into debt, you know? It's like I said, in agriculture, you either grow or you go away. Or you diversify into a specialty cut or specialty processing of some type. But yeah, especially in agriculture, you've got to be moving somewhere, doing something that changes. We didn't do that. We didn't have the opportunity to grow bigger. We tried some different methods, but it's more difficult for us

to expand down here as property values went up. They had the same problem on Long Island. There's not nearly as many farms, if there are any left. I'm not even sure that there are any left anymore because the property values go up. You can't expand your farm because it costs so much to capture that land to be able to grow ducks on.

[00:12:47]

JT: Yeah. So, how did you become interested in food as a career option?

[00:12:52]

WB: When I was young, my father would go around places and cook duck, like at grocery stores, to get people interested in it. Like you go into a grocery store today and you see people giving out samples of something to get people interested. That was what he would do. He would set up a little electric rotisserie and rotiss duck, and give people samples for them to try. And then that grew into us doing some at a festival. We set up a booth and we were sampling duck at it, at the Urbanna Oyster Festival. When I went to college and told people that I grew up on a—that my family business was a duck farm, it sort of maybe gave them weird images of what that meant. So, I kind of did the same thing. I'm like, okay, let me bring this to reality for 'em. I cooked some duck one night, and then that turned into a party that we did at a house off-campus. By the time I graduated, we were serving twelve hundred people at a college of two thousand. Yeah.

[00:14:03]

JT: Where did you go to school again?

[00:14:03]

WB: Lynchburg College.

[00:14:05]

JT: Lynchburg College, okay.

[00:14:05]

WB: Yeah. Right here in Virginia.

[00:14:07]

JT: What were some of the images or misperceptions that people had about duck farming?

[00:14:12]

WB: That it might be raising ducks to have at ponds and parks. [Laughter]

[00:14:20]

JT: Okay. [Laughter]

[00:14:22]

WB: When you think about duck, some people don't think about eatin' duck. They think about Donald Duck, all the cute things that duck brings up. So, yeah, that's what it was.

[00:14:35]

JT: Okay. So that got you interested in pursuing food as a career option?

[00:14:40]

WB: Yeah, it actually became a senior thesis, because I was a business major. And doing, growing that party, that food festival, that kind of private food festival, got me interested in doing catering and carrying that concept, that private food festival, to other colleges. We successfully brought it to Radford, to J.M.U., and to Mary Washington College. And from there, went into catering weddings. Because the catering is cyclical, especially in the spring and the fall, those are your busiest times, when the weather's really nice to be outside and to have weddings and family gatherings. I realized I needed to have a restaurant, a base to work out of, and something to keep employment, keep a consistent base of operation. So, after five years of doing just catering, I opened up the restaurant and that was . . . twenty-five years ago. Twenty-six years ago.

[00:15:59]

JT: Okay. So, what kind of experience did you want to bring customers with your initial . . . doing the restaurant?

[00:16:04]

WB: Local. What I grew up with, you know? Especially the crab cakes and the oysters and the oyster stew. The same thing that I was doing at colleges, 'cause what I was doing

with the duck fest was, I brought duck. We brought oysters. We brought steamed crabs. And clams. Things that I grew up with, things that are from this area that I was familiar with. I would come home, pick up these foods, bring 'em back to school, and cook 'em up at a big party. That was the same thing that the restaurant became, was representing. It was easy to think about. That's the foods right at your hands, so why not use 'em?

[00:16:51]

JT: Yeah. Where did you learn to cook seafood?

[00:16:55]

WB: Probably just from my mom.

[00:16:57]

JT: From your mom?

[00:16:57]

WB: Yeah. Because I liked to throw the parties at college, learning, and so I learned how to grill on a large scale. Yeah. But that's . . . yeah. I would say my passion for cookin' food definitely came from my mom, for sure.

[00:17:14]

JT: Why is that?



[00:17:14]

WB: Gosh, I mean every time we sat down at the table, there'd be something different on the table. It didn't work out too well for me when I was a kid, but I got to appreciate it as I got older. [Laughter] I would have been happier with a hot dog every night. [Laughter]

[00:17:32]

JT: With the seafood, did she have any signature way of doing things in the kitchen, even using appliances or . . . ?

[00:17:41]

WB: I think this signature that I remember is using cast iron to sear, yeah. As I've gotten older, that's a beautiful thing, you know? The only pans I have at home are cast iron, and we cook all of our crab cakes here on cast iron. We use cast iron skillets. We don't do 'em on the flat top or drop 'em in the fryer like most places do. We use a little skim of olive oil and sauté 'em in cast iron. It gives a sear that you can't get in any other kind of pan. When you go to the store or watch commercials on TV, you constantly see these new pans, the green pan, the copper pan, all that stuff. It's . . . there's nothin' like cast iron. And the old cast iron, the cast iron that's made before the 1930s, is just . . . there's nothin' like it that's new.

[00:18:40]

JT: Is that what your mom used at home, old cast iron?

[00:18:41]

WB: Um-hm. Yeah. That was passed up from her grandmother. I mean, I'll pass mine on to my kids, too. Yeah, that stuff doesn't get old. Unless you somehow apply so much heat that you can actually warp it, yeah. If you keep 'em seasoned, I can't imagine mine ever going away. Yeah, yeah. You don't lose the surface on cast iron 'cause you create it. You're seasoning and creating a surface on the cast iron to cook on. That's the seasoning of it, right?

[00:19:20]

JT: Wow, that's beautiful.

[00:19:23]

WB: [Laughter] It is beautiful.

[00:19:23]

JT: Yeah. It's really, it's wonderful, yeah. So, the time has come for me to ask you about crab cakes.

[00:19:23]

WB: Um-hm.

[00:19:31]

JT: So, with as much detail as you can, how is the optimal way that you make crab cakes

here?

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WB: Put no vegetable, onions, peppers, in the crab cake, because the flavor, the meat, is so delicate that you just want to season it just to complement the flavor of the crab but not overwhelm it. That's real important in all cooking, but I think especially with crab cakes, because the flavor of the blue crab, the Chesapeake Bay blue crab, is so delicate and beautiful. We use an old Tangier recipe, and it's got simple ingredients, just enough of things to bind the meat together to sauté in the pan so it doesn't fall apart when you go to turn it over. Then, like I said, we sauté it in olive oil in a hot pan, and . . . I mean, it's pretty simple. It's pretty simple, but in that simplicity is just incredible beauty.

[00:20:45]

JT: Mm-hm. How did you come across this recipe?

[00:20:49]

WB: In a Tangier cookbook. Yeah, yeah. And I searched with my mom. She identified that as the recipe that she used, too, and I think it was from Mrs. Crockett's Crab Cake House was the official recipe that she used. You know, you can't improve on perfect.

[Laughter]

[00:21:17]

JT: Yeah. You said it was a clam chowder, or was it . . .

[00:21:20]

WB: The oyster stew is the other, yeah, and that's my mom's, yeah.

[00:21:25]

JT: Can you walk us through that? You don't have to go into specific ingredients if you don't want to.

[00:21:28]

WB: Yeah, yeah. We use heavy cream and, like I said, a pinch of cayenne. We use a little bit of sherry to give it some body. Just fresh, local, wild-caught oysters. There's simplicity in that, too, in that recipe, also. In the restaurant setting, we find it's important to cook the oysters to order so that they're plump and they're fresh. Each bowl or cup of soup, yeah . . . that's as simple as it gets, yeah. Yeah. We've been servin' that since we started. At first, my mom would bring all the soups to the restaurant, and she took care of all of the soups. Then we, as we progressed, we were able to take it on ourselves and not rely on her. But we keep a lot of—we keep some of the things that she brought to the table still alive, yeah.

[00:22:43]

JT: Yeah, absolutely. So, when you first started, where were you getting your seafood from? Locally or . . . ?

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WB: Um-hm. We were getting our crabmeat from Charles Chase. I can't remember the name of his crab house right now, but we'd drive out there to . . . to where his crab house was and pick up the crabmeat. We always were getting it locally, getting local, fresh meat. But in the wintertime, we'd get pasteurized meat. There's no difference, absolutely no difference. Especially once you cook with it. I mean, I don't think right out of the can that you can really notice the difference between pasteurized and fresh. We got pasteurized in the winter because I've never thought that dredging crabs is the right thing to do. You know, it kills as many crabs as it harvests, because crabs burrow at different levels. So wherever the rake is set, it's either gonna tear the back off a crab or it's gonna harvest the guy that was shallow. The deeper guys, they're gonna get speared. I don't think it's—and it disrupts the natural layers of the bottom of the river. So, I've never felt like dredging is the right thing to do. We don't support that, just like we don't support veal. We've never served veal. I don't think that that's the right practice, right thing to do.

[00:24:27]

JT: Does that come from your time as a kid on a duck farm?

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WB: Well, I suppose so. Yeah. I mean, it's enough to harvest animals, but you've got to treat them properly, yeah. We use only fresh eggs here that are from a local farm. They're way different from what you get in the grocery store. It's because of the way they're treated, you know? They're able to run around in the field and chase bugs instead of being

cooped up in massive production facilities. The way you treat the animal affects the yield.

[00:25:13]

JT: Yeah. With the eggs that you get, where do you get 'em from?

[00:25:16]

WB: We get 'em from, the farm that we use right now is called the Yellow House Farm. It's a local chicken farm. It's just . . . they have maybe two hundred birds, and they're right here in White Stone, right in town. They just bring it on down here and, yeah . . . and we buy about sixty dozen a week. We sell a lot of eggs here.

[00:25:52]

JT: Yeah. How is the flavor different than what you would get at Costco or Food Lion?

[00:25:58]

WB: It's so much richer. It's so much more complete. I mean, the flavor that you get from eating an egg, it's like . . . doubling or tripling that flavor, the intensity. The yolk is much more of a—it's a darker color. It's got more color. The texture's smoother. It's really interesting. We make hollandaise from the egg yolks, and we haven't always had fresh eggs available to us, especially in the volume that we use. We used to use regular eggs. Since we switched over to the farm eggs, the hollandaise is so bright and beautiful on top of the poached eggs now that we serve on Sundays. It is gorgeous, it is beautiful.

[00:26:59]

JT: What changed that made it so that the fresh eggs were available to you? Was it that the farm started, or . . . ?

[00:27:06]

WB: That the interest in that has grown, and that the interest in that farm-to-table and that the supply was able to be enough for it. We tried lettuces long ago, but the time period—we tried a lot of different local produce since we've started. But the availability is just so difficult and varies so much. One day you might get zero, and the next day, you might get enough to work on for a couple of days. But then, in a restaurant, you've got to keep the products on your menu. You've got to keep them consistent. People come in, they want that flavor they had last time. They want that salad, they want that whatever it is that they had last time or that they're lookin' forward to having. You know, you gotta make it available. The way that we run our business, we keep the same menu year-round. So people are familiar, they're comin' back for the flavors that they had. So, you've got to make decisions on how you make that happen. Some restaurants vary their menu almost daily depending on what's available. That's never been our model, as a larger restaurant in a rural area. That's harder to do. Smaller restaurants it's easier—it's more doable. I wouldn't say it's easy.

[00:28:39]

JT: How has availability and anticipating availability changed since the [19]80s?

[00:28:45]

WB: . . . Gosh. Zero to sixty?

[00:28:52]

JT: Okay. [Laughter]

[00:28:55]

WB: I mean, I don't know how else to say it, you know? When it was so difficult to find, and now it's much more readily available. Now there are farm stands that are set up year-round that provide local produce, and that's . . . we didn't have anything like that before. Now, there are regular, local—what do they call it, on the weekends? We have farm markets in certain places every week. Every Saturday, in this area, you'll find farm markets. We never had that before. You know? Just wasn't any interest. But I think that there's some frustration with the commercialization of food, that people—it keeps ratcheting up, and I think that people have gotten to the point where they're reacting to that. They don't want just whatever's handed to them in whatever way that it can get to them in the cheapest method. They want things, they realize that there's . . . I think, through that process, flavors have gotten washed out, too. I think when people make a switch to a farm-fresh egg, they realize, "Wow. I don't want that washed-out flavor anymore. I don't want that injected . . . hormone-fed, caged-up process anymore." When you get those flavors, you realize the connection, and how the process needs to go back to more traditional ways than what it's turned into.



[00:30:49]

JT: Yeah, absolutely. So, what has the relationship been like with your distributors—not distributors. The guys that do the fishing and the local egg folks and farm market folks?

[00:31:06]

WB: You know, it's cool. We do a lot of our shopping at local supermarkets. They do the ground beef. We always have gotten our ground beef locally. It's superior to anything we can get. There's a local grocery store, Tri-Star, has a small meat department that still cuts their own meat. They don't just get 'em in the packages and put the prices on them. They would cut it and they grind it and they take a lot of pride in their work. It's beautiful. They cut all our steaks, and the cool thing is, because they know that we like quality products, when they're cutting steaks throughout the day and they run into a beautiful piece, they'll cut those steaks for us and send 'em to us. How's the relationship? The relationship is those guys come down here and get hamburgers and steaks. [Laughter] 'Cause they know what they're gettin', right? They're takin' pride in it. So, they almost follow our vehicle back down here to get the food. It makes a nice little circle, you know? Same way with the oysters. It's a place real close to my home, so I can pick up the oysters on the way in, and it's the same way. Those guys come here and get seafood, 'cause they know where it comes from. And it's small family businesses. You build relationships, you know? You build relationships with everybody in the meat department, check out people, all the—there are a lot of Mexicans that work at the oyster house. They found that that labor force works out well for them. Build relationships with them, learn Spanish, you know? And . . . you realize that there's this whole other aspect that comes with it, and it's

about relationships. It's about deepening relationships, and through that process, you create better for the community, I think, because we're gettin' the best oysters from the oyster house, the Kellum's, we're gettin' the best meat from the grocery store. It just . . . it's satisfying, just the process of going and gathering these things, because of the relationships and the energy that you share when you go to these places. It's all so satisfying. You know you're getting top-shelf; you're delivering the best that you can get from the area.

[00:34:04]

JT: Do you have a particular person that you look forward to working with over the course of the week?

[00:34:11]

WB: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[00:34:14]

JT: Okay.

[00:34:14]

WB: Well, Michael Painter that runs the meat department . . . he operates on many levels. And also, he's a musician, so he performs here and he helps with contracting the musicians for our Thursday nights. So, there's multiple levels we can contact on, plus that makes it a lot more interesting. There's a guy—and I don't know where in Mexico he's

from. He's told me, but . . . his name is Cheque, and he teaches me Spanish every time I go down to the oyster house. I, in respect him and his culture, try to learn that and speak with him in Spanish when I'm down there, because I know that that's more respectful. When you go to a foreign country you, as much as possible, try to speak in that tongue because that's respectful. Respect works. [Laughter]

[00:35:28]

JT: Yeah. You know, I've talked to very few people that have been inside the oyster houses. What is that like in there for you as a person that owns a restaurant?

[00:35:38]

WB: Oh. Well, Kellum's runs such a clean operation. So, when I go in there, everything is just at really high cleanliness standard. Otherwise . . . I mean, I watch them pack oysters. Sometimes I'll come in there and they'll pack the oysters right in front of me, so I know the quality, I know the sanitation. And the shell oysters, too. Sometimes we get the shell oysters from them, as well, that we'll shuck out, for oysters in the half shell. I can see the piles of beautiful oysters and, yeah, that . . . that's a fantastic connection, when you see . . . when you've been raised on the river and you packed oysters, you were weaned on oysters, you know what they're like and what the quality is like. So, when you go in those oyster houses and you see beautiful, a pile of beautiful shell oysters that they're shucking from, it's sort of magical.

[00:36:50]

JT: Yeah. Yes. So, with the watermen there's been a demographic shift to where they're older, and it's kind of phasing out. How have the changes in the water industry, the seafood industry, affected you?

[00:37:07]

WB: You know, I don't think that I've seen it yet. I think that some of the fish, some of the local fish, are harder to get because they're not—they're harder for me to get local, like right here. I think, in part, because the fishing—and I'm talking about the little guys with scales and fins—the fishing is not as robust as it was. Maybe because there're not as many people to do it. Maybe because of other commercial aspects of that industry. But I've noticed no different in oysters. When the oyster season is right, when it comes in and certain oyster grounds get opened up, there's no lack of boats. They're out there. And it's like a dance, too, because sometimes the areas are not real big that they're oystering in, and this is the public ground that the state opens up. They'll open this up. There's also private ground that people have that they manage themselves, but the state manages some ground. And when they open up, man, it's like a dance. The boats are going back and forth, and you'll see in a relatively small area, thirty boats? Fishing? I can't imagine how they work it out. When you've got a line that you're running on picking your oysters up, 'cause they dredge—and dredging oysters is fine, it's different than crabs—but when they're running a line and another boat's running another line, I don't know how they work it out. Maybe it's whoever's got the biggest boat, or maybe it's whoever calls chicken first, I don't know. [Laughter] But it's interesting to watch. I don't see any, I don't see any . . . I don't. I think the oysters are still, I think it's pretty robust right now. It's a

cyclical industry. There are cycles to oysters. It's just on a nice upswing right now.

[00:39:26]

JT: How has tourism changed demand in this area since you've started? Is it different kinds of food that people want? Is it local food that people want? What do they want if they're comin' from out of town?

[00:39:38]

WB: I think it is. I think it is more local food. They want a local flavor, and why wouldn't you? If you're coming to an area, the last thing I'm gonna want is a chain restaurant to go to. You want flavors from that area, beers, wines from that area, foods from that area. And I think that that has increased, slowly, over time. I think that there's always kind of a base for that anyway, because when people come to an area—it's just like when we're hired to cater and we got people coming from outside of the area, local people like to showcase what we have. So, the menu items that they choose will be driven by what's locally available. So, people coming from the Midwest out here for a wedding can experience things that they've never had before. Yeah.

[00:40:45]

JT: Do you think that would be any different if you were nearer to Norfolk or Yorktown or something like that? Is there something specific about this area that draws a specific kind of tourist?

[00:40:59]

WB: That's a good question, but yeah, I think there are certain things. I don't think you can get a better oyster than what comes off the Rappahannock River. I was raised on it, so I might be biased. [Laughter] So, I think that what they're looking for is crabs and oysters, especially, 'cause you're on the Chesapeake Bay, you're on the Rappahannock River, and it's certainly what I think of. But definitely a different dynamic. We, for eighteen years, were in the middle of town, at a crossroads in the middle of White Stone. When we had the fire, we moved down here, we wiped the menus off and served the exact same menu on the table. And because of the view of the water and the suggestion, our seafood sales doubled from what we were just a mile and a half away. [Laughter] Right? Just because of that looking at the river, just makes people think about seafood. Same exact menu. I mean, we weren't doing anything to make them except that we had a different atmosphere. So, we've made adjustments to accommodate for that, because that's what people want. They come here and say, "Hey, what's fresh seafood? What can I get that's fresh?"

[00:42:31]

JT: What do people, both locally and tourists, think about Rappahannock oysters and seafood specifically? Like, what's so special about Rappahannock seafood?

[00:42:42]

WB: Um . . . honestly, the flavor of the mud.

[00:42:51]

JT: Really?

[00:42:54]

WB: [Laughter] That's what it means to me. I grew up with my toes in the mud up in the banks of the Rappahannock River, and it's not a bad thing. It's the composition of the soil that's at the waterline, and there's a flavor—to me, there's a flavor of that soil composition that is in the water. This mud is on the bottom as well. It's not just sandy bottoms here. There's a lot of mud bottoms. When you pick up oysters off the river bottom, they're covered in mud. You gotta wash them off. That flavor gets in the oyster, and that's not a bad thing. Some people call it buttery. I don't think it's butter. Maybe some parallels between butter and the mud of this area, but . . . I wouldn't call it buttery, but it's definitely a flavor of its own. I don't think that you experience them in many other oysters. Yeah. I don't find it affecting the crabs so much, but definitely the oysters. The oysters are filter feeders.

[00:44:13]

JT: Okay. So, when you opened the place in the downtown area, what building did you move into? What had been there before?

[00:44:22]

WB: It had been a restaurant before.

[00:44:23]

JT: It had been a restaurant before. Okay.

[00:44:25]

WB: Mm-hm, yeah. It had been a restaurant before. It had been a car dealership before that. It had been a car shop because it had a big door on the front. It actually was a fold-out door, it wasn't like a roll-up door. It was an old, wooden fold-up door. The Hupmobile was there, which was an automobile that had kind of a short lifespan. It was one of the manufacturers that kind of came and went, maybe 1930s, 1940s, something like that?

[00:44:59]

JT: Wow.

[00:45:01]

WB: There was a General Motors dealership there. With those doors, they could bring cars in, and I think that's the way that the building was originally built. Then it was turned into a restaurant, and then we bought it. It had been closed for a while, and we bought the contents of the building, started renting it. We were there for eighteen years. That was 1991, 1992? I think we actually opened our doors in August of [19]92, yeah.

[00:45:37]

JT: Okay. So, when you got in, how did you spruce up the interior and decide the menu



and . . . ?

[00:45:44]

WB: Well, it was set up very nautical when we moved in there. I like more kind of just a country atmosphere, so I brought things—same thing as what we're doing in here. In fact, there's some of the same items on the walls. I brought things from the old tools in the basement of your house that your grandfather had, and different things from my house, from my mom's house. I was living with my parents at the time, and I brought different things from the house, just old relics that were in the basement or in the attic, and just put them up on the walls.

[00:46:26]

JT: That's awesome. So, for the menu, how did you put together a menu the first time around?

[00:46:33]

WB: That's a good question. That's a good question. I think from the things that I like. And we were just lunch at the time, so it was sandwich-driven. One thing that I did was go around to the local eateries and see what they were doing to make sure that what we were doing would be different. I still do that today. I actually avoid learning more about the restaurants that are local to us so that we are not influenced by that. I think it's important for each restaurant to be individual, and then as a collective, that becomes much more valuable to the community and much more interesting than if you have a

bunch of places that are just duplicates of each other. When I go for inspiration, I'm goin' out of town. I'm goin' to Richmond, I'm goin' to Norfolk, I'm goin' to other cities, and find things that will inspire me.

[00:47:38]

JT: When you were going to other places, especially early on, did Virginia have a food scene at the time? Were there things that were special about places like Richmond or Norfolk that you noticed, or that influenced you?

[00:47:55]

WB: There were, and I tried to bring 'em here, but it didn't work. It didn't work. I spent a good amount of that time being a vegetarian and trying to bring things like hummus and tabouleh and different mixtures of vegetables. Wasn't what people wanted, you know? Out here in the country, it's just a small market for that kind of thing. You put falafel on the menu and you put all this energy into it and you make this wonderful tzatziki sauce, you put it all together and you're thinkin', "Oh, I can't wait to eat this at the end of lunch." It's like all you had—you might sell one during the day. It's like, "Aww." So, yeah, you've got to stick to the knitting, and not also your own knitting, but also the knitting of the area to, I think, in an area like this. If you're in Richmond, you can niche yourself and you can become the whatever king of . . . of different types of niche foods that we can't do here, because there's just not the market for it. You know? I've tried a lot of different things but, yeah, crab cakes and oysters are . . . what you can do to diversify, how you bring those to the table, is more important. We do flatbread pizzas here at night, and we

do our own dough, and we just do different types of mixtures of things on top. One thing that we've found that's really interesting is an oyster Rockefeller pizza, and it rocks. People eat it up. I mean, how interesting is that? If you bring combinations like that that are different together, and you use local things like that, it works better with . . .

[00:50:05]

JT: What's in an oyster Rockefeller pizza? Like what are the toppings?

[00:50:08]

WB: We use spinach in it. We use onion. And we make up the Rockefeller sauce. Also, we use some bacon in it as well, and the whole oysters on the top of it and bake it in the oven. Yeah.

[00:50:23]

JT: Wow.

[00:50:24]

WB: We use a real thin, we make a flatbread pizza, we just take a dough ball and roll it out with a rolling pin real thin, and then toast it on a flat-top griddle, and then build our pizza on that and flash it in the oven. Yeah.

[00:50:39]

JT: So, when you first were opened at the new place, did you build up regulars pretty

quickly for lunch?

[00:50:50]

WB: Yeah . . . we had a really good following, really good following for lunch. Then we opened for dinner, and I thought we were gonna rock the world, but I think they still identified us as a lunch place. We'd been a lunch place for eighteen years. During that time, we diversified in a coffee house and a breakfast spot, too, for like the last four years of being in that building, but . . . being a breakfast spot here doesn't work as well during the week, 'cause we're off the road and we're off the path. But opening for dinner was more of a challenge than I thought, to get people to think about and identify with us being a dinner spot, was more challenging.

[00:51:38]

JT: The folks that would come in, you said you had some regulars that you were fond of. Was that at the old location as well?

[00:51:47]

WB: Oh, yeah.

[00:51:48]

JT: Okay. So, who sticks out in your mind?

[00:51:53]

WB: Bill sticks out in my mind. I couldn't recall his last name. He's passed away many years ago. Real character, came in every single day. [Laughter] Got the same hamburger, cooked the same way, every single day and the same glass of tea. How that interests people, I don't understand, but I appreciate it. Real character, you know? Just really spoke his mind and was an umpire for local Little League. He was very passionate about that, and about kids learning how to be a good sport, yeah. Bill stands out in my mind a lot. Dolan, Dolan. One of the things that really kind of rocked me one day was, Dolan would come in with his wife and they would be real personable. He brought pictures of them when they first were dating, and shared them with the staff one day. And it just really struck me, of how deep relationships come. You're just goin' somewhere to eat, and how that was important for him to share. And it really changed things for me, I think, realizing that that level of a personal connection with people, that people were willing—you know, not everybody wants to share things with you. Some people are closed, but some people like to just, it's real important to them. He was older, and he wanted to share some history that he had in his life, and especially with his wife, that he was totally in love for forever. He wanted to share that with us . . . [Speaking away from recorder] Do you remember, Angela, when Dolan brought pictures—when Dolan and his wife, remember Dolan and brought pictures of them when they were young? I don't, maybe you weren't here that day. It was pictures of her and outside of a car.

[00:54:09]

Angela Haislip: I have seen them back in the day. He showed me a few pictures.

[00:54:11]

WB: Right. Yeah. I was just reflecting of how personal that was, and it really . . . it gave me a different perspective, just how personal a relationship can be. That he would kind of lay himself out like that.

[00:54:30]

Angela Haislip: A lot of us have relationships with our customers at work. Look at Becky and Reva, my God. People in Florida, they got on an airplane and went to spend the weekend with these people. [Laughter] How much more personal can you get? They just hop in a bed with them. I mean, that's the only other personal you can get. [Laughter] I mean, those are the people in here. I've had relationships with, got a relationship with, so, yeah.

[00:54:57]

WB: Yeah. Angela has—

[00:54:59]

Angela Haislip: [inaudible 54:58] I mean, some of 'em. I mean, we really come to know their families. And they know our families. Like my daughter has twins. There's not a regular in here that don't know that. [Laughter] And they always ask, "How are the girls doing? What's going on with them?" So, yeah, we . . . some of us, I won't say all of us, but some of us really do take to our customers, and they do become part of our family. We get really sad when they pass away.

[00:55:28]

WB: Yeah.

[00:55:28]

Angela Haislip: Or there's a couple now that we know are going through the stages of Alzheimer's, and it's very hard for us to see that, because we remember how they were. And now we're almost kind of going through it, and we see the anguish. Most of it's men, believe it or not. We see the anguish in the wives' faces. I think a lot of times, we kind of step in and we make 'em feel a little bit more comfortable, but some of these people can fly off at any time. And we just kind of know that that's not them, and we just let it go and tell the wives it's no big deal if they make a big deal, "I didn't order that." It's hard sometimes to see things like that. So, yeah, we do take it very personal, a lot of them.

[00:56:13]

JT: Thank you for that.

[00:56:13]

WB: Yeah. Yeah, that is a real interesting aspect of it, is the personal relationships with people that are regulars. Deep personal relationship. Like she said, this couple flew the two bartenders down to Florida just to hang out and share that experience that they have when they're down in Florida with the bartenders. [Laughter]

[00:56:44]

JT: Wow. That's really special. And also, I guess, staff—it seems like you've had a lot of staff for a while, like periods of time?

[00:56:52]

WB: Yeah. Gosh, I don't even know how long Angela's been here. [Speaking away from the recorder] Angela, how long have you been with Willaby's?

[00:57:02]

Angela Haislip: Oh, Lord, William. [Laughter]

[00:57:05]

WB: That's what I was just saying. I don't even know how long. [Laughter]

[00:57:12]

Angela Haislip: Hold on. Either this September, it's gonna be thirteen years or fourteen years. I think this September's gonna be fourteen.

[00:57:22]

WB: Fourteen years?

[00:57:22]

Angela Haislip: Yeah.



[00:57:22]

WB: Cool.

[00:57:22]

Angela Haislip: 'Cause Reva's been out of school . . . yeah.

[00:57:31]

JT: Okay.

[00:57:31]

Angela Haislip: Fourteen, I think, in September. I'm the last of the Mohicans besides Sandy.

[00:57:34]

WB: Besides Sandy. [Laughter]

[00:57:38]

Angela Haislip: Well, then, Reva's been here thirteen.

[00:57:38]

WB: Right?

[00:57:39]

Angela Haislip: One year behind me. We're the three last of the Mohicans.

[00:57:43]

WB: Sandy is about twenty, twenty-five years, I guess.

[00:57:50]

JT: Wow.

[00:57:52]

WB: Twenty-four or twenty-five, yeah. She's in the front office. I don't know if you—she unlocked the door for you. She's a more behind-the-scenes person.

[00:58:05]

JT: Okay. How have the staff put their own mark on Willaby's?

[00:58:14]

WB: Oh, wow . . .

[00:58:20]

JT: In the kitchen, or . . . ?

[00:58:20]

WB: Yeah, absolutely in the kitchen. Certainly, the wait staff in the dining room, they've certainly set a tone in here. They're all part of the process. I don't make decisions without them, because with them being on the front line, they have a lot more insight than I do about things that work or don't work. Nobody wants to make their job more difficult. So, in terms of streamlining things to make it easier, they're the ones that know about it. Choosing coffee carafes. We had that discussion yesterday, because we got one in from a company that we've always used, but they changed the design and it wasn't workin'. It's like, gosh, why would you change something that works, right?

[00:59:14]

JT: Yeah.

[00:59:14]

WB: Yeah. And cooking, as well. There's a lot of freedom with doin' any kind of features you want or soups. I don't dictate any of that. We wouldn't get anywhere doin' it. Who wants to be caged up and told what to do? No. By them doin' it and bringing their own self to the table, the whole place is in their hands, for sure.

[00:59:50]

JT: So, within the community of staff, do you mostly hire local folks? What kind of folks work at Willaby's?

[01:00:04]

WB: I look for people that are gonna fit in before anything else. I look for people that are gonna fit into the culture we have here, because that's what I've learned is the most important. At one point, we brought in a chef that . . . was my way or the highway, and it was real disruptive to our culture. So, I know that that is the most important thing. You can train people. And there are some—I think a lot of the local people that, especially when I'm thinking in the kitchen, enhance what we do. 'Cause people have learned from their families about cookin', and they bring a little bit of that to the table. I mean, a lot of that to the table, you know? Kisha just—man, those soups that she and Barbie do, world-class. Cheeseburger stew? One, that just come off the top of one of 'em's head. It was stellar. I have soup every single day here, even if it's hot outside. That's my side dish. I won't get French fries or whatever. Man, the soups are just so good. That's totally them; that's their expression, and that's things that they grew up with and they learned, techniques they've learned from their parents or aunts and uncles or whatever.

[01:01:45]

JT: Yeah. And the fact that your mom used to do that for you, that must be really special, too.

[01:01:48]

WB: Yeah, so.

[01:01:51]

JT: Cool. I also understand that the previous location burned down?

[01:01:58]

WB: Mm-hm.

[01:01:58]

JT: Do you want to describe that day?

[01:02:01]

WB: [Laughter] Wow, that was difficult. That was difficult. 'Cause it's like eighteen years of thousands of projects, right? That you do every day that just . . . to bring a place to life. Yeah, it was real difficult. But I think the process of—'cause the whole back half of the building was totally incinerated. [Radio turns on] You need to—do you need to have that cut off? Let me get that cut off for you.

[01:02:49]

JT: Okay.

[Break in recording]

[01:02:51]

JT: So, we were talking about the fire with Mr. Barnhardt.

[01:02:56]

WB: Okay. Yeah, the process of digging through all the ashes and going through

everything to collect what was usable and what wasn't, and throwing it away, was difficult, but it was certainly made a lot more doable because of local support. I had friends that helped me with the shoveling-out process. Buddies from college, from different places in the country, gathered together to do fundraising to help. The staff, all just stepped back and waited in the wings to come back. We found this place. They all came here. It's like I said, it was in rough shape. We had to clean it up and get it ready. Took us like six weeks. All the staff worked on that, and they were all part of opening it up. I don't know that we lost even one staff member, and we were closed over a hundred days.

[01:04:24]

JT: Wow.

[01:04:24]

WB: Yeah, yeah. And the support from the community was just essential. It was . . . it was kind of overwhelming, when you get in situations like that, and the way that people support each other. It's a powerful thing, yeah.

[01:04:47]

JT: Yeah. Do you remember anything in particular you were able to salvage or weren't able to salvage that made it to the new place or didn't make it to the new place?

[01:04:57]

WB: Yeah, my grandmother's quilt. Yeah, that was the big deal, that old raggedy one on the right. Yeah, that was cool. I mean, that had to come with us.

[01:05:08]

JT: Yeah. Did you find it in the . . . ?

[01:05:13]

WB: Mm-hm, yeah. The dining room itself, the front half of the building, was separated by this big, brick wall, three layers of brick thick. So, it was more smoke damage in the dining room, so a lot of things we were able to recover from the dining room. It's the back kitchen that just got totally demolished. When you have smoke like that, anything that's electronic or electric you throw away. Yeah, refrigerators, all stuff like that, all that gets thrown away. But yeah, that quilt, I think, was the big thing. There was a lobster pot that I had on the wall that I think—but yeah, that quilt was the big one.

[01:05:55]

JT: What purpose does the quilt serve in your new restaurant?

[01:06:02]

WB: It's decorative. It's interesting to see the quilters, when they come in, get drawn to it and look at the way that it's put together, and the back of it and all that. But it serves, in a big way, for the acoustics for our live music performances. Yeah, it helps soften the room.

[01:06:27]

JT: Great. So, what was this building before you opened here?

[01:06:29]

WB: It's always been a restaurant. It was opened in the 1950s when the construction of the bridge started, and it was open for the purpose of, primarily, serving the guys that were working on the bridge, 'cause there were so many guys down here working on it.

[01:06:49]

JT: Really? Wow.

[01:06:49]

WB: Mm-hm.

[01:06:52]

JT: It's enormous. It's a very big building.

[01:06:54]

WB: It was small then, yeah. It's been added to since then. It was here to there, and only that—it was only twenty feet deep. It was probably fifty by twenty, was the size of it. It's just that front dining room we were in, and that was the kitchen, as well. They had like a little diner set up where you would cook on the back, and there's a counter on the front.



People sit down, kind of bar seating sort of thing.

[01:07:26]

JT: Okay.

[01:07:27]

WB: Yeah.

[01:07:28]

JT: So, there's amazing local things all over the place inside. Can you go through some of those?

[01:07:33]

WB: Yeah. There are a lot of the things that you would use on a boat. I'm drawn towards them, like . . . there's a few different designs of natural scrub brushes, one that's made out of hickory, and that's got a really interesting design, because the reeds that make up the brush are made from back pulling with a knife the outside structure of the wood, and then bringing it into a brush. The other one is a typical one you see; it's a corn broom, it's made with corn husks, bound together on the end of a stick. Makes a great scrubber for the top of a deck. There's . . . oyster tongues, there are clam rakes. There is an eel gig that you use to gig eels with from the boat. There are pots and pans. There are dipping nets that you would use for getting soft crabs out of the little tanks that they keep soft crabs in. There's probably a one-third scale airplane that's hanging in the ceiling that my brother

gave to me. Yeah, that's some of the things I can think about. A lot of the things that are on the wall were given to us by regular customers, cleaning out their basement. There's a certain amount of things that came from my family, but there's a lot more stuff that came from regulars that just said, "Hey, I ran across this and thought you might want to put this on the wall."

[01:09:41]

JT: Do you have favorites in your mind, regulars and their stuff that they brought?

[01:09:46]

WB: Um . . .

[01:09:47]

JT: You look at it on the wall, and you think of them?

[01:09:49]

WB: Yeah, definitely. Definitely. I can't recall the name right now, but the man that brought the oyster tongues by just . . . yeah, yeah, there are some people that I think about and their connection to their things.

[01:10:10]

JT: Great. So, after the fire, how did the community respond, the folks that didn't work here or who were regulars or maybe just supported you?

[01:10:25]

WB: Written notes of support. Facebook was alive then, so it was notes through social media and e-mails, real supportive. More in the form of notes. Some people came by when we were shoveling out the other place, and it was a lot of offer of support to help along the way.

[01:10:55]

JT: Do you have a specific example of that, someone who's local here?

[01:11:03]

WB: I know a real good friend of mine, Joye Burnett. She came and helped, and asked for no pay, but just came and helped every day and helped shovel out. We were friends since childhood. We played soccer together from our teens. Came and shoveled out and helped with things and gathered the old stainless that we could take to the recycling. The kind of really interesting thing that she did was, she took some of the burnt wood from Willaby's and brought 'em back to her dad, and her dad makes model boats. He made a model deadrise out of the burnt wood from Willaby's, and it's in the front foyer now for people to see when they come in. That was amazing. He does beautiful model boat work. He builds them just the way that they were built, when the full-size ones are built. He builds planks the same way. All the building technique is the same, 'cause he likes to—like what you're doing, he likes to document boats and do a kind of a freeze on history so that people can understand the way that boats were built. That's where his passion is. He

doesn't sell 'em, he just puts 'em up on the shelf in his workroom, and they gather the dust from the boats that are made after that, the sawdust. So he's got all these boats on the wall because it's important to him to document them. Yeah, he's made a beautiful boat in the front foyer. It just really touched me, that they would do something like that. That was one of the things I think that struck me the most, and just the beauty of Joye's love and her father's love that came through that.

[01:13:16]

JT: Yeah. So, now that you're over here—and that was 2009 that you . . . ?

[01:13:25]

WB: Mm, [20]10. 2010, yeah.

[01:13:28]

JT: When all this happened, okay. Since you've moved over here, a lot has happened in the state. What do you want people to take away from your food here that's uniquely Virginian or uniquely Rappahannock or anything like that?

[01:13:49]

WB: You know, I think there's a connection to the area, a connection keeping that Tangier recipe alive. I mean, why wouldn't you? It's just so wonderful. My mom's oyster stew recipe and chili recipe. I think that passing those things along and appreciation for them is what I would like for people to take away from it. It would be the whole

experience that I want to affect them. Specifically, I think, if I were to pick out certain things, it would be crab cake, oyster stew, chili, and the traditional way that they're made.

[01:14:45]

JT: Mm-hm. You also do entertainment here. Did you do that at the old place?

[01:14:48]

WB: Did not.

[01:14:49]

JT: Okay. And that started here?

[01:14:52]

WB: That started here because we were serving dinner. Had no problem bringing lunch people down here, because they were used to being a lunch place, but for the dinner people. And so . . . I probably spent more on my concert education than I did on my college education, so it just made sense for me to utilize that in some way.

[01:15:19]

JT: Okay. [Laughter]

[01:15:21]

WB: Still do. Been to a lot of live music. A whole lot of live music. And I have

appreciation for that. Through that process, I've met and gotten to know a lot of local musicians, and as we started hosting the music—that whole regional music community is amazing, how many musicians there are in a rural area like this and how talented they are. There are a lot of singer songwriters that are out in the middle of nowhere. It's wonderful seeing them come to the stage and bring their craft, 'cause there's a lot of uniqueness to so many different styles and expressions of music.

[01:16:04]

JT: So, the food you serve is uniquely Virginian in a lot of ways, and local. What is the local music flavor that comes here?

[01:16:16]

WB: . . . I don't find, really, a local music from this area. Like if you were down in Southwest Virginia, it'd be easy to pick that out.

[01:16:28]

JT: Yeah.

[01:16:31]

WB: It'd be easy to pick out bluegrass as kind of a basis and things that come from bluegrass and the people that came together in that area, in the Appalachians, to make that music happen. It's very diverse here. There's everything from local bands—I'm talking singer-songwriters that are reggae, that are bluegrass, that are folk, that are . . .

kind of a funk-style, electronic funk-style, as well as rock. There's a variety of music around here. There's nothing that I really identify as being that way. Certainly, we tend more towards folk influences, Americana, because I think it's easy to host acoustic music in a space like this. But we have full electric bands that play in here as well. Yeah. What I try to do in that is just diversify it, and just have all sorts of styles, so that we're representing a variety of different music. And I tend much more towards singer-songwriters or people that are doing unique twists on music, rather than just trying to do a duplicate. We focus more on that, because there's a uniqueness to that, too. That homegrown . . . style that singer-songwriters bring.

[01:18:41]

JT: Yeah, absolutely. So, I am gonna close pretty soon here. Is there anything that I haven't hit that you think we should talk about?

[01:18:56]

WB: Nothing that I can think of. The only other thing that's a personal passion of mine is our craft beer.

[01:19:06]

JT: Oh, okay.

[01:19:07]

WB: Yeah. Hugely passionate about our lineup of beers. We have twenty-eight taps. Two

are wines; one is an effervescent wine, you know, a champagne. Sixteen of them get rotated constantly. Two of those lines are pushed with nitrogen, which gives a different mouthfeel to the beers that are served on 'em, but all those sixteen are rotated constantly, with different styles, different breweries, different places. We have a beer on, we just put on this past week from Canada.

[01:19:56]

JT: Wow.

[01:19:58]

WB: Beers from all over.

[01:20:00]

JT: You know, that's a growing thing. How do you feel like you fit into that?

[01:20:05]

WB: It's like the music. It is a natural expression of something that I've been doing for so long. I've been into craft beer for twenty-five years, and seeing it expand has been a fantastic thing for me, 'cause to me, the experience of drinking beer is an adventure. I don't go to the same beer every time I go to get a beer. I want a new expression, I want to learn more about different styles. To me, it's an adventure. So, being able to bring that adventure to other people, it's a natural passion. So, being able to play that out through my work is a delight. It's a delight to be able to do, if someone comes up to the bar or I



walk up to the table and they ask me about beer, they're probably going to get, maybe more than they want to hear about beer, because I'm . . . unless they're as passionate as I am about it. We've been able to affect a lot of people and their experience with beer by having such a diverse collection of beers in such a remote spot.

[01:21:29]

JT: Mm-hm. So, why did you get into that? That's around the time you actually started Willaby's, right?

[01:21:36]

WB: Why did I get into it here? Because we started serving dinner, and I was able to. And also there was the explosion of craft beer that was already happening. It was easier to get beers like that on tap. The distribution was coming out here. Before that, it was tough to get. The distribution of craft beers wasn't out here. You had to go to Richmond to get the experience of beer. My first big craft beer experience is in 1987 out in Seattle, Washington, out in the University District. The scene was already exploding out there, and it was just, "Holy cow! What is this?" Every bar you go into has got a different selection of beer. Some of 'em were brewing their own beers. I mean, that was unheard of in [19]87. At least in the area we were in. So, serving dinner was essential, because we can't have twenty-eight taps if we're running lunch, just running lunch, but serving dinner. And also the music nights have helped with that, too, because the coming together of beer and music is kind of natural, too.

[01:23:08]

JT: Yeah. In the future, what do you want for Willaby's? Do you want it to keep going after you're done? Do you have young people that you want to pass it on to in spirit, things like that?

[01:23:23]

WB: Yeah. You know . . . it's only now that that sort of thing has started to cross my mind, so I don't really have anything developed on that. My children are twelve and seventeen, and I think that I wouldn't want them to take it on unless it was something that really served them and that they were impassioned about. I don't. I don't. And it may be that, when they make the replacement bridge, it comes right through here and the building is gone. Whether or not I would relocate, I don't know. You know? It would depend on those sort of elements in place: would it be worthwhile? Would it be something that would be continued on? 'Cause I had to weigh that out eight years ago when it burned the building down. I was thinkin', "Do I want to do this? Do I want to move to a place that has been—a lot of failed businesses have been here? Do I want to take that gamble? Do I want to try to fix up that place that's just been neglected for so long?" Yeah, I don't know. We'll see what the next chapter brings. I'm constantly doing things every day that play out my passions in this space. I got a long ways to go. It'll be a long time before I think about that. [Laughter] I can't imagine giving up. I can't imagine stopping, 'cause it's a constant creation process. Can't imagine it. It's just . . . yeah.

[01:25:19]

JT: Yeah. What advice would you have for young people looking to bring Southern food or Virginia food to other people in the way that you have?

[01:25:36]

WB: I think that, first, know that it's something that you want to get into, because it's not just bringing food to people, the whole process of food service. It's multidimensional, and there are a lot of things to manage. There are a lot of stressors, multiple stressors, at all times. There are multiple things that are happening that are extremely challenging. You have got to have the passion and desire to do that, and be willing to take the time that it takes to see things through. And to deal with all the emergencies and the different things that come up. You've got to be able to do that, and have the supportive situation that lets that happen. Then, beyond that, to keep digging and finding the things that are worth continuing, finding the things that are—like the things that we've talked about, kind of the center trilogy that I'm thinking of: the crab cakes, the oyster stew and my mom's chili—that you want to continue. I think those things are important. Or if it's styles or if it's specific recipes. I think they're vitally important, 'cause people are looking for that kind of thing. I think that they're interested in unique. At least I think our crowd, the people that we serve, I think are looking for that.

[01:27:53]

JT: It's interesting that unique is also very traditional for you, and that it's been done and redone before. Why is that? How can unique and traditional be the same thing for you here?

[01:28:07]

WB: Well, I think it's unique because you don't—because people come to this area. I think that's probably what makes it unique, because every recipe is unique, every song is unique, every expression of music is unique. But I think the traditional and unique that comes together is just personal, and it's . . . it's important to me because it maintains traditions of things that are of my fiber. You know? So, and I think it's important to keep things like that alive and not replace them with crab cakes that are frozen and come off a truck. Oyster stew that you just pop out of a can. Or chili that you pop out of a can. That has been the progress of our culture, is to do things simply and to immediately gratify, because there are other things that you have to do. And nothing can be more important in your life than food. Loving people around you, maybe, yeah. But the food, that's what keeps you going.

[01:30:00]

JT: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

[01:30:02]

WB: I don't think so. I think that beer was the big part.

[01:30:06]

JT: Okay.

[01:30:09]

WB: Yeah. [Laughter]

[Break in recording]

[01:30:09]

JT: Mr. Barnhardt has something to add. [Laughter]

[01:30:15]

WB: Yeah. One of the things that I think has kind of haunted me or been with me throughout my life is kind of the dilution of culture, and I think one of the things that's always stuck with me is the culture of Tangier. I got introduced to it as a kid because the community that I grew up in was one of the communities that the people spread to. In 1930, there was a big storm that came through Tangier and some people just threw their hands up in the air and said, "You know what? I'm not going to be out here on this vulnerable island anymore. I'm moving to the mainland." And some people moved to Irvington, some people moved to Urbanna. I grew up in Urbanna, and there weren't a lot of Tangier people, but they really stood out to me, the way that they talked, the culture behind them, what they talked about. Friends of mine and I learned the dialect and could speak with each other in their dialect, because it was so interesting. And how that isolation of that island has kept that culture intact for so long. You think about the way TV has just made people speak in a Midwestern tongue throughout the nation. It just continues to, as media spreads throughout, it just influences people to be more of the same. I think that this project of encapsulating things at a certain moment in time is so

important, because that stuff is incredibly interesting.

[01:32:07]

JT: Yeah.

[01:32:08]

WB: The way that people talk, the way that people do things, the priorities in their life. The culture, the way that they get from Point A to Point B. You go to another country and you see that people do things differently, and you think, "Oh." Your first thought is, "Wow, that's not a good idea. The way we do things is this way, and that works great." But if you take it in the context of where they are and what distribution systems they have and what climates they have, it's really smart. It's a great idea. It fits into their scheme of things. So, I think it's important to respect that and to preserve that.

[01:32:50]

JT: What about Tangier's culture when you came here was shocking to you, when you first encountered it, anyway?

[01:32:56]

WB: You know, I grew up with it, so it didn't really shock me so much. As I got more in touch with it, I understood more about it. I know at first, I think when we were kids, we sort of made fun of it. But, as you get older, you realize, wow, that little island was preserved for so long. All of its micro-culture was preserved for so long because of its

isolation. You know, you can't buy a refrigerator there. You've gotta have it shipped in from the mainland. If you want an air conditioner for your house, you've gotta get it shipped in from Reedville. So, I think the shock was just realizing how—it was turning around. It was like from making fun of it to respecting it, was more the shock, if there's a shock. It was realizing how important that is.

[01:33:59]

JT: Um-hm. That's amazing.

[*END OF INTERVIEW*]