

BARBARA POPE
Joe's Hot Tamale Place/White Front Café
Rosedale, MS

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Date: July 21, 2005
Location: Joe's Hot Tamale Place/White Front Cafe dining room
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Length: 54 minutes, 5 seconds
Project: MS Delta Hot Tamale Trail

[Begin Barbara Pope]

0:00:00.0

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Thursday, July twenty-first, 2005 and I'm in Rosedale, Mississippi, with Barbara Pope, current proprietor of Joe Pope's White Front Hot Tamales. And Miss Pope, would you mind saying your name and also your birth date, if you don't mind, for the record?

0:00:22.4

Barbara Pope: **[Short laugh]** My name is Barbara Pope, and my birth date is September twenty-fifth. You want the year?

0:00:30.3

AE: If you don't mind.

0:00:32.0

BP: Nineteen forty-four.

0:00:33.7

AE: Okay; you have a birthday coming up in a little while. Happy almost-birthday to you.

BP: Thank you.

AE: And Joe Pope was your older brother?

0:00:42.4

BP: He was the oldest of ten children.

0:00:45.5

AE: Okay. And he was born in [nineteen] twenty-four, is that right?

0:00:47.6

BP: Nineteen twenty-three.

0:00:48.9

AE: Twenty-three, okay.

0:00:49.7

BP: Uh-huh, December the ninth, 1923.

0:00:55.4

AE: He passed in December of last year, right?

0:00:58.0

BP: He passed on December the third.

0:00:59.6

AE: Oh, my goodness. Okay. Wow. And where do you fit into the family, then?

0:01:04.3

BP: I'm the last.

0:01:04.8

AE: You are the youngest?

0:01:05.3

BP: Yeah.

0:01:07.5

AE: Okay; can you tell me a little bit about your family's background? Are y you all from Rosedale originally or--?

0:01:13.0

BP: My parents were born and reared in Alabama. Most of my sisters and brothers were born in Alabama; only three of us were born in Mississippi. And they came to Mississippi, I think, in the late [nineteen] thirties and we worked--they were farmers. And they worked as farmers up until 1957, I think, and that's when they moved to Rosedale from the farm.

0:01:47.4

AE: Was the farm in--in the outskirts of Rosedale?

0:01:50.2

BP: Yes, it was.

0:01:51.6

AE: Okay. And they came to Mississippi to farm?

0:01:54.9

BP: Right. Some of my father's uncles had left Alabama earlier, and they came here. So I think it was a little better here than it was in Alabama, so they decided to come here.

0:02:16.8

AE: Were they sharecropping or were they independent?

0:02:19.3

BP: They were share---well the older--the first group of people--family members that came here, they were owners. They were landowners. But my father worked with them for--I don't know how many years and then he began to sharecrop. And he did that until he retired in 1957. That's when he left farming.

0:02:45.4

AE: And what were your parents' names?

0:02:48.5

BP: Emma--my mother is Emma, and my father is Jake.

0:02:51.9

AE: Jake?

0:02:52.8

BP: Uh-hm, yeah.

0:02:53.9

AE: Okay. And so growing up in that environment, do you have many memories of that? They retired about--I guess eight or ten years after you were born?

0:03:02.7

BP: I have a lot of memories. [*Laughs*]

0:03:03.9

AE: Yeah, can you talk about that a little bit?

0:03:04.3

BP: I can remember—well, you didn't take anything for granted. I mean, you know, everything was just free; that's the way we looked at it as children. We--there were a lot of people living in the country and we had a lot of neighbors, so we just walked from neighbors to neighbors on weekends, and we did a lot of visiting. One thing we had to do was go to church on Sundays; we did that. And my mother and father were the type of people, they loved to ride. And I don't like riding now.

0:03:43.4

AE: Horses?

0:03:44.0

BP: *[Laughs]* No, they loved to drive—drive to drive different places.

0:03:46.0

AE: To drive, oh, okay--okay.

0:03:48.2

BP: And once we got out of church on Sundays, we were all--just the three of us were at home my three younger sisters, and they would put us in a car and we would just drive. They would ride, take us--we would drive maybe to Jackson, to Vicksburg, to Memphis. They would--they just loved to drive and look. And they would take us. And to us it was boring because we would rather be at home playing with our friends. But we were out, you know. And now you see--we appreciate it, because you learned a lot. You saw a lot of things that you wouldn't have seen, you know, until you were grown, an adult and basically go out and do these things yourself. So--but then we didn't want to. *[Laughs]*

0:04:38.6

AE: What all would you do when you got to say, Vicksburg or someplace?

0:04:41.5

BP: We would get out. We would go to--we always went to--we went to the--the cemetery, the National Cemetery down there. We would go down, and we would look around there. They would always take us down to the riverfront and we would look around--just walk around and look and we would stop and we would eat. Then we would come home late in the evening.

0:05:10.0

AE: Do you have any memories of eating hot tamales when you were a kid?

0:05:13.0

BP: Nope, never.

0:05:14.3

AE: None?

0:05:15.0

BP: Never; I don't think I ate a tamale until gosh, I think I was about a teenager.

0:05:23.8

AE: Yeah?

0:05:23.2

BP: I know I was a teenager the first time I ate a tamale.

0:05:28.7

AE: So in the 1960s somewhere?

0:05:32.5

BP: In the late '50s.

0:05:34.4

AE: The late '50s?

0:05:36.9

BP: Yeah.

0:05:37.8

AE: So tell me about your brother.

0:05:39.8

BP: Joe?

0:05:42.0

AE: Yes.

0:05:44.1

BP: He was quiet, low-key but loved people. He loved meeting people, he loved talking to people, but he did more listening than he did--than talking, you know. And I don't know. To me, everybody that met him liked him. And I think he liked everybody he met. He loved talking about his tamales, and he loved other people praising him about his tamales.

0:06:22.1

AE: How did he get into the tamale business?

0:06:24.1

BP: I guess--I really wasn't here when he got into the business, but he'd been in the business for over thirty years--about thirty-three years or something like that. He had a friend that used to make tamales here some years ago, and he left here. So his father--this man's father--still lived here. So they were talking, and he asked Joe about making tamales, you know, and they would go through the recipe. So, well, he took some of his recipe and then he added extra spices to it, so it wouldn't be just exactly like his. But, you know, the basic--just about the same except the seasoning was different.

0:07:23.6

AE: Uh-hmm. What was Joe doing before he got into the tamale business?

0:07:28.5

BP: Joe always worked for--as an--as a young man, he used to work at Dattle's Department Stores here. And then he worked for D&L [an automobile parts factory] in Cleveland. I think that's where he retired from--D&L, and then after he retired from D&L he came in and started running his own business full-time. But he had other people that would work for him while he worked. I think he worked the nightshift. Well, he worked the three o'clock shift. So he would work in the daytime and then during that time they were staying open until two or three o'clock in the morning. So when he got in at twelve, he would come up here on weekends and work until two or three o'clock in the morning.

0:08:28.3

AE: Hmm, that's a long day.

0:08:28.7

BP: It was a long day.

0:08:32.0

AE: Well I read somewhere that was--was John Hooks the name of the man--

0:08:36.9

BP: Uh-hmm. Yeah, right.

0:08:38.5

AE: -- that shared the recipe and something about him getting it actually from a Mexican in the [nineteen] thirties? Is that the--

0:08:43.6

BP: John Hooks did; there were a lot of workers coming through here in--back in the [nineteen] fifties, there were a lot of Mexicans living around in this area, so I'm sure that's where he got it from--those Mexicans that would come through here, yeah.

0:09:06.1

AE: Do you have any idea or recollection of the--the Mexican immigrants that came through here? Did they ever sell tamales?

0:09:13.3

BP: No, not that I know of.

0:09:15.7

AE: Okay.

0:09:16.8

BP: And even when they were living here, I can't remember any of them selling tamales. But now there were quite a few of them here during the [nineteen] fifties and maybe the early [nineteen] sixties, but they all just vanished. I don't know where they went to. **[Laughs]**

0:09:34.1

AE: They vanished and the hot tamales stayed.

0:09:36.6

BP: Yeah; but they never made them. I guess it was someone that made them out of their home and they just taught him how to do it. Uh-hmm.

0:09:47.0

AE: Do you have an opinion of how--how it is that the African American community in the Delta has held onto that tradition of tamale making?

0:09:54.7

BP: I really don't know. Yeah, it--because most people think that it's--the restaurant is owned by Spanish when they come here, you know, and then they find out that they are not. But most of the tamales around here are owned by black or white, so there--there are no Mexicans that really make them. And most of people that make them, the Mexicans make theirs a little different from ours.

0:10:28.7

AE: [Man enters café. Interviewer addresses him] Hey. [Then to Mrs. Pope] I can pause this. [Recording is paused for about three minutes while Mrs. Pope speaks with the man, a friend.] Okay, so we were talking about how the Mexican community didn't really make or sell them that you know of or certainly sell them.

0:10:40.5

BP: No, not that I know of.

0:10:42.4

AE: The black community did. So your brother Joe was working at D&L and then--so would you say that he was looking to get into the tamale business to supplement his regular income and--?

0:10:54.5

BP: Well he was work--he was running this place before he started working at D&L, I think.

0:10:59.1

AE: Oh, okay.

0:11:00.3

BP: Right; he started this business first because--I think he started--that would be in the early [nineteen] seventies. I think he says he was in like thirty-three, thirty-four years.

0:11:19.1

AE: Okay. So when he opened it, he opened it as a full-time hot tamale business?

0:11:23.8

BP: Right, he opened it full-time.

0:11:26.8

AE: Do you have any idea what was in this building before he got it?

0:11:29.8

BP: This was a restaurant. This lady--I can't think of her name. I think her name was Babe. They called her Babe. And she cooked dinners here. When we were children you couldn't--I mean, every vacant lot you see now, there was something on it, and there was so many restaurants here and people really ate out, especially on weekends and through the week, too, but on the weekends where all the people would come to--the farmers would come here on weekends and they had--this is--this was a big thing for them to come and have dinner because you could a--a dinner for like twenty-five cents back in the [nineteen] fifties and sixties.

0:12:23.7

AE: What kind of food were they serving here?

0:12:27.3

BP: Soul food. Complete dinners, uh-hm.

0:12:31.6

AE: And so did she retire, this Babe or do you know what happened to her?

0:12:36.6

BP: I'm not sure. I'm not sure what happened to her.

0:12:40.8

AE: And then your brother came and opened the--did he call it the White Front initially or--?

0:12:45.4

BP: This was the White Front Cafe.

0:12:45.3

AE: It was already the White Front Cafe when--?

0:12:48.5

BP: Yes, this has always been the White Front Cafe.

0:12:49.2

AE: Okay.

0:12:49.5

BP: But I think he took over the places--another little place--it's torn down now—around the corner--that Hooks had, and I think he opened that one--that up for a while, and then he moved over here. I think that's the way it was.

0:13:10.2

AE: Was he the main tamale maker when he first opened? Was he the only one doing it?

0:13:14.5

BP: He was. The only one.

0:13:16.6

AE: Do you remember hearing about any kind of trial and error in--in cooking them or preparation or the learning curve--something he had to figure out?

0:13:24.8

BP: No. Because I really wasn't here. I left in 1963, and I came back in 1996.

0:13:35.9

AE: Where did you go, and what did you do?

0:13:36.8

BP: To Chicago, uh-huh.

0:13:41.2

AE: And there's another kind of side-story to all this tamale business. John T. Edge, our director at the Southern Foodways Alliance, is looking into the Mother-in-Law sandwich, evidently, that's in Chicago that's a--a hot tamale on a bun and then dressed with all different kinds of things. Have you heard of that?

0:13:57.4

BP: [*Shakes head "No"*]

0:13:57.7

AE: No? [*Laughs*]

0:13:58.9

BP: I never ate one in Chicago.

0:14:00.4

AE: Really? Okay.

0:14:01.8

BP: Never ate a tamale. This is--I think--I haven't ever tasted another tamale.

0:14:06.6

AE: Really--other than your brother's?

0:14:09.7

BP: Uh-hm.

0:14:09.9

AE: Hmm.

0:14:11.1

BP: [*Laughs*] I really haven't, but I--I always said that I was because I--I guess I've never been anywhere where they really sold them, you know--because I do go to Greenville, but when I'm there I'm taking care of business, and I'm trying to rush back. But other of my family members have; they have eaten other's tamales. Plus, a friend of Joe's, he's a Mexican, he went down to Mexico, and he even brought back some Mexican tamales so Joe could see them. But they--they don't have cornmeal, they have flour. And they're very large. But I didn't taste any of those. They cooked them here, though.

0:15:06.4

AE: Oh, really?

0:15:07.0

BP: But I wasn't here that day when they cooked, and so I didn't taste any.

0:15:11.8

AE: Do you remember what your brother had to say about them?

0:15:15.3

BP: They were spicy--very spicy. Much more spicier than those are.

0:15:24.4

AE: And I also heard somewhere that your brother was making—originally, he was making pork tamales and then changed to beef?

0:15:32.7

BP: I'm not sure. That I don't know. Ever since I've been here, they've been beef, so I'm not sure about the pork. I really don't know.

0:15:45.2

AE: Well over the years, did your brother share any stories about people coming through or a really big tamale sale or any--any good stories that stick out?

0:15:56.2

BP: There were--we have people coming through from all over, and I would say in the last four or five years they have *really* come through. We had some from Australia, and we had some from Germany and some from England--there were several other countries. I can't remember where they came from. And we always have customers from the east coast, the west coast. So they always come through. We've had quite a few come through this year. I didn't know so many people toured the South until they started stopping in and buying tamales. So we've done tamales for weddings. That Variety Club of Memphis, they gave him that certificate because he did tamales for them. I think the hospital, too--the Jewish one. The one in Memphis?

0:17:07.4

AE: Yeah.

0:17:10.6

BP: I can't think of--it's the Children's Hospital. It's in Memphis, but they were giving some kind of benefit for them and this man from--I think he was from Delta & Pine Land [Company], he was associated with them, so he had Joe to do like eighty-dozen of tamales for them, and that's what they gave him--that certificate of appreciation. We do them for--I have--next month, I have a wedding. This lady in Cleveland, she wants me to do some for a wedding. A man in Memphis wants me to do some for a birthday party. So they used to order like twenty, thirty dozen for things like that.

0:18:09.9

AE: How many would you say--without counting special events like that--how many tamales would you say are made here in a week's time?

0:18:18.7

BP: How many we do a week?

0:18:20.7

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:18:22.0

BP: We do--like this time of year [the summer], it's slow, it's hot. And I don't think too many people eat tamales. So we go--we've cut down to like 160-dozen, per week. In the wintertime we can do like from three to 400-dozen, per week.

0:18:49.4

AE: Wow. So who else works here and who--who has over the years because I know, when I've been here before and there have been a whole group of women rolling and--?

0:19:00.8

BP: There were. But only two of us work here now. Plus my family--I have a ninety-seven year-old mother.

0:19:10.9

AE: Your mother is alive?

0:19:12.5

BP: Yes.

0:19:13.8

AE: Oh, my land.

0:19:14.9

BP: That was the reason I came back here--to be with her, not knowing that I was going to have to take over the business. [*Laughs*] So my sisters take turns coming to be with her while I work. So they, in turn, come and help me out here, too. So it's only one that works like part-time. She only works on the days that we roll.

[*Young man walks into café. Sound of door closing.*]

0:19:38.1

AE: Okay.

0:19:38.5

BP: Other than that, she doesn't work.

0:19:42.6

AE: Okay, let me pause this again. [*Recording is paused for about three minutes while Mrs. Pope speaks to the young man.*]

0:19:46.0

[*Recording resumes*]

BP: That was Joe's little friend. Everywhere Joe went, he went.

0:19:50.9

AE: Yeah? A sidekick, huh?

0:19:53.8

BP: Uh-hmm. He still comes in and sits.

0:19:59.4

AE: So has it always been other members of your family who have worked here?

0:20:05.1

BP: Just recently.

0:20:06.4

AE: Just recently, okay?

0:20:07.1

BP: Uh-hmm. There are four that were--Joe had three ladies working with him then.

0:20:17.1

AE: And was your brother here up until when he passed or was there a time that he--?

0:20:21.3

BP: He did. He worked up until the week of Thanksgiving. The week before Thanksgiving that's when he had the heart attack. Because two of my sisters came in on a Wednesday, and he went and picked them up and that Thursday he had the heart attack. And he lived on two weeks after it.

0:20:51.7

AE: So how did the recipe change hands? Is it something that--that he shared at the very end or is it something that the family knew?

0:20:59.4

BP: With me?

0:21:00.3

AE: Yeah.

0:21:01.0

BP: Well, I had been working here with him for about seven years because, you know, he was ailing, and I would come in and do as much as I could for him. So it was something that--I had watched him, but I had never done it myself. So it was the--the week before he passed, we were sitting there because this place was the last thing on my mind. And he said to me, "Did you order any meat?" I said, "Huh?" [*Laughs*] I mean yeah, he said, "Did you order any meat?" I said, "No." I said, "You want me to order meat?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You want me to cook?" He said, "Yes." [*Laughs*] So another one of my sisters and I were sitting there, and he started going over the recipe. And it really didn't interest me, but she was writing everything down. But I really knew. She thought I wasn't paying any attention, but I knew how to make them. I knew what to put in them. But he--she wrote it down, you know, to make sure. I didn't--o after he said start cooking, so I started cooking from then, and I've been cooking ever since.

0:22:31.3

AE: Do you enjoy it?

0:22:33.0

BP: I do, I enjoy it. I guess, you know, you enjoy listening to the people appreciating what you do, you know, so it helps a lot. And I appreciate the customers because he has some devoted customers, and they are still devoted to me, so that makes a big difference.

0:23:03.5

AE: Has he had some customers that have been coming since the very beginning?

0:23:07.5

BP: He has. Well, he has here--around here he has some customers from Delta State [University in Cleveland, Mississippi], Dr. [Henry] Outlaw and Dr. Luther Brown. They're really nice, and whenever they have anything at Delta State they call and place their orders, and they still come over, you know. It's like they never stopped. And you have some come from around Clarksdale, and you have quite a few from Memphis and Jackson. They still come.

0:23:42.7

AE: Did your brother ever advertise at all?

0:23:47.4

BP: No, never.

0:23:48.3

AE: Just word of mouth, huh?

0:23:50.8

BP: Never. There were several people--Dr. Luther Brown put him on his website [<http://www.blueshighway.org>]. *Gourmet* magazine, I don't know where they got theirs, but I think they came through. And the *Commercial Appeal* out of Memphis, they came through here, and they did an article. And what's that--*roadsidefood.com*? [Actually, www.roadfood.com]

0:24:21.5

AE: Yeah, the Sterns [Jane and Michael].

0:24:24.3

BP: They did an article and *Southern Image*. She's married to a man from Rosedale, the lady that did that, so she did. I guess that's how he got—really, the word got out, you know, by those different people.

0:24:45.7

AE: Yeah.

0:24:46.4

BP: Uh-hm, because when the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis did theirs--oh we had tons--we couldn't keep them in stock.

0:24:52.5

AE: Really?

0:24:55.0

BP: Yeah, they [the customers] really came out a lot.

0:24:58.6

AE: And when you sell tamales to go, people need to bring their own containers, right?

0:25:03.4

BP: If they want the juice.

0:25:06.3

AE: Okay.

0:25:06.6

BP: Most people want the juice from the tamales, and they have used it for different things. A lot--some people have told me that they pour it over salad. Some said they dip French bread or Italian bread in it, you know. They just--they like it. They say it has a good taste to it. But I never tasted it. *[Laughs]*

0:25:33.8

AE: You need to try it. Well are there many locals who come through and get hot tamales?

0:25:39.1

BP: We do.

0:25:39.6

AE: Or would you say it's mostly people on the road?

0:25:41.1

BP: We do have, but, you know, most of your local people are one-dozen or two-dozen or three-dozen people, and they come in, yeah.

0:25:51.5

AE: Uh-huh.

0:25:52.3

BP: They--they're very supportive. But I would say even the people from Cleveland, they buy large amounts, you know, when they come over. Because most of the time when they come over they coming from a fair, so they will buy like twenty dozen. I'd say from ten [dozen] on up.

0:26:14.6

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:26:14.8

BP: And then you have some people that live--when they live at a distance, like--they will come and buy the frozen ones and just keep them in their freezer because, you know, it may be another two or three months before they come down through here again.

0:26:29.0

AE: Uh-hm; are there many people who sit at these tables and just have a few?

0:26:31.9

BP: Some--I would say mostly the tourists, the ones that are traveling through here. Or sometimes some of my friends just come in and sit and talk. But, you know, they eat. But sometimes--but most of the people that really stay in here I'm going to say are the tourists that are coming through.

0:26:50.1

AE: Yeah. And what is your schedule for making the tamales? Do you have a regular one? Like a weekly schedule?

0:26:57.6

BP: What day?

0:26:57.9

AE: Yeah.

0:26:59.1

BP: Not really. It's--most of the time I cook on Tuesdays and Thursdays--the meat--and we roll the other--in between those days, we roll the tamales.

0:27:13.8

AE: Okay. Do you have any idea when your brother started this place, where he was getting his shucks and--and different ingredients for the tamales?

0:27:22.3

BP: No, I don't know. I don't know where he got his--now when I--I know he got his meat from Berry Packing that's out of Arkansas. It's a meat company out of Arkansas. That's where he got his meat, *[sound of woman entering café and door closing]* but I don't know where he got this—

WOMAN: How y'all doing?

BP: [To woman] Hi. [Back to interviewer] But when I came here he was getting his shucks from Lambert Meat Company.

0:27:52.6

AE: Oh, in Cleveland, okay.

0:27:53.8

BP: In Cleveland.

0:27:55.9

AE: Okay. So you were saying that you cook the meat on Tuesdays and Thursdays and roll on the in between days?

0:28:02.4

BP: Uh-hmm, we cook--we buy the meat, we cut it ourselves, we ground our own meat, uh-hmm.

0:28:13.3

AE: What time of day do you start when you cook and when you roll and how long does that take?

0:28:19.8

BP: Whenever I get here. [*Laughs*] Most of the time I try--on the days that I cook I try very hard to get here at ten [in the morning]. But sometimes I have to take care of my mother, if no one is here. So on the days I cook, I don't do anything else but cook that day, anyway. I'll be in here.

0:28:45.9

AE: Do you have a family of cooks?

0:28:48.9

BP: No.

0:28:50.6

AE: No?

0:28:51.6

BP: No. [*Laughs*] No. No, they do not cook.

0:28:58.9

AE: Did Joe ever cook growing up that you remember?

0:29:01.0

BP: [*Sound of door opening and closing, man enters café*] No, Joe never cooked. I don't think Joe hardly made his breakfast.

MAN: Hey, y'all.

BP: Hi.

MAN: You want me to fix the door?

[*Recording is paused for about five minutes, as Mrs. Pope speaks with this man.*]

[*Recording resumes*]

BP: Joe barely fixed his breakfast. [**Laughs**] But he loved making those tamales, though.

0:29:17.0

AE: And that's what his name carried so far and wide for. That's interesting.

0:29:22.8

BP: Uh-hmm. He loved making tamales and that's about all he ever, as I say, cooked. He would get up and he would cook--sometimes he had his breakfast. And no one in my family really cooked. I mean it was like outside or--

[Sound of door opening and closing]

0:29:54.0

AE: So he just said he would help you cook, the friend that was just in?

0:29:59.6

BP: No, they had--the owner, they're promising to fix that door and he--he told me that he had asked one of his friends to come fix it for him because he has land. He farms. And he said he had been working on the farm, and he didn't have time to come up. But he said he may have to take--take a few minutes off and come up and fix the door.

0:30:24.7

AE: So this--this building has been rented all these years?

0:30:26.7

BP: [*Gestures*] Yeah.

0:30:28.0

AE: Okay. And tamales have maintained a--a home and lifestyle and family and building all these years. Did your brother have a family of his own?

0:30:38.0

BP: Yes, he had children. He has three children, uh-hm.

0:30:43.8

AE: Are they in Rosedale or Mississippi?

0:30:44.9

BP: No.

0:30:46.8

AE: Where did they end up?

0:30:48.7

BP: One--he has two in Chicago and one in Washington, but he lives in Suitland, Maryland.

0:30:58.1

AE: And does he have a widow or did she pass?

0:31:01.9

BP: His wife's been deceased since [nineteen] sixty-seven.

0:31:06.8

AE: Oh, my.

0:31:09.4

BP: Uh-hmm, yeah.

0:31:10.3

AE: What did Joe's kids think about the business? Did they ever work here or have a hand in it at all?

0:31:20.4

BP: No. I don't think they would come back here right now. They're all working, and I don't think that much money is in the business where they would quit their job.

0:31:35.4

AE: So are you going to stick with it for the long-haul?

0:31:39.3

BP: I'm going to try to as long as I can. Uh-hmm.

0:31:45.3

AE: And I see this new sign with glitter on it with the new prices.

0:31:48.1

BP: *[Laughs]*

0:31:49.4

AE: That's six dollars a dozen and three dollars for half a dozen and a bunch [three] for a dollar fifty. How--what--how have the prices changed over the years, do you know?

0:32:00.5

BP: Well, I don't know. They were five fifty or five dollars up until last year, and I guess they've been five dollars for like ten or fifteen years. They were all--they said, "Joe, raise your prices." "No, no." But it's very expensive to make them.

0:32:27.3

AE: And very labor intensive to make them, definitely.

0:32:30.6

BP: Yes.

0:32:32.6

AE: Do you know what he was selling them for when he first opened?

0:32:38.7

BP: Was it two? Something like that.

0:32:41.8

AE: Two dollars a dozen?

0:32:44.1

BP: Uh-hm.

0:32:44.7

AE: That's a lot of years to go by to only raise four dollars in price. **[Laughs]**

0:32:47.2

BP: That's what I know. He doesn't--he didn't want to raise them to six dollars--no. His accountant told me **[Laughs]** when I first took over the business, she--she says, "Barbara, you look at what's going out and what's coming in. " So, she had a good point because the meat is expensive, and the shucks are *really* expensive.

0:33:20.0

AE: Did he or have you ever considered going to parchment paper? There are a lot of people in the Delta who roll in a paper.

0:33:28.5

BP: You know, no, because a lot of our customers remain with us because we stayed with the shucks, you know. They said they don't like the paper because the--there's too much grease

inside, and they don't even--we roll by hand. They stayed with us because of that because they said they don't like the machine. But it's faster and it's cheaper, but--.

0:34:06.2

AE: In addition to rolling by hand, do you also layer the cornmeal and meat by hand?

0:34:12.5

BP: Uh-hm, uh-hm.

0:34:13.7

AE: Okay. Yeah, there are not a lot of people that still do that.

0:34:19.7

BP: Nope. Most of them, they love that machine. It's faster, much faster.

0:34:24.6

AE: Yeah. [Laughs]

0:34:27.0

BP: But I guess sometimes we have to do--do things to satisfy your customers. We have good customers, so I guess if we didn't really have good customers we would change. But I'm sure down the line there will be some changes made, but right now I'm just in the process of learning the business so--.

0:34:52.9

AE: So when you have a day of rolling are there jobs that certain people do each time, or do you kind of rotate responsibilities? Like one person ties and one person--?

0:35:02.6

BP: Um-um.

0:35:04.0

AE: You all do everything?

0:35:03.9

BP: Everybody. They do their rolling and they do their tying, um-hmm.

0:35:11.2

AE: And y'all sell candy here and pickles and sodas and whatnot, right?

0:35:15.9

BP: Right.

0:35:17.8

AE: Is that a good supplement to the hot tamales?

0:35:19.8

BP: It is.

0:35:20.2

AE: Do you sell a lot of those things?

0:35:21.5

BP: Well, the children--at first, I had stopped selling the candy after Joe passed, but the children wanted the candy. So I started back. I haven't really gotten everything in yet, but in the summertime--I don't like candy--it gets too hot in here for the candy, so maybe when it starts getting a little cooler, I will get the Snickers [candy bars]. They like the Snickers and--and it doesn't last too well in the summertime.

0:35:55.0

AE: Yeah.

0:35:57.1

BP: Uh-hmm. But I--I'll go back to it in the wintertime.

0:36:01.9

AE: Well what do you think it is about your brother and the hot tamale business and this place that has lasted here so long?

0:36:10.9

BP: Well, besides having good tamales, he was just a nice person. And I think that has a lot to do with staying in business. He had a good personality; he just loved everybody, you know. So I guess that helps a lot, you know, because anybody who walks through that door, if you wanted to

sit down and talk to him about the tamales, he was ready. Yeah. I think that helps. He was open, uh-hmm.

0:36:54.7

AE: Well and being on the [Mississippi] river, how did that affect his business over the years, if at all?

0:37:02.8

BP: Like many people passing through?

0:37:06.5

AE: Uh-hm.

0:37:08.9

BP: Well, you know, I really think he had--he had a good business. Because there were still a lot of people around here that knew about his business. And like Joe has worked with Dattle's Department Store, so he knew a lot of people, and a lot of people knew him. So you see people coming in here now, they have children and they were saying, "When we were children, we went to Dattle's and we--Joe waited on us. He'd get out--get the shoes or he would measure, you know for this and that," you know. So he knew them. Some of them are not here. They've moved out of Rosedale but still they come back and--and they remember him, you know.

0:38:01.6

AE: When I--a couple weeks ago I did an interview in Cleveland [Mississippi] at John's Homestyle Hot Tamales--John Williams, is that his last name?

0:38:09.2

BP: John Williams, uh-huh.

0:38:09.1

AE: And he said he's cousin to y'all.

0:38:13.4

BP: Cousin, uh-hmm.

0:38:13.2

AE: And he wanted to open a tamale stand and kind of replicate what your brother was doing all these years and try to make it in the hot tamale business, too. You're not--you say you haven't had any other tamales, have you not had his?

0:38:27.5

BP: Um-mm.

0:38:28.8

AE: No? Are y'all close as cousins or is it--?

0:38:33.1

BP: Our fathers were first cousins; there were two brothers. There were sister's and brother's children--our father.

0:38:41.9

AE: And then John also worked at D&L, I think, if I remember. And so they--

0:38:45.4

BP: I'm not sure.

0:38:46.7

AE: --maybe they worked together over there.

0:38:48.3

BP: Uh-hm, they might have. Because, see, John's mother lives here. His mother lives here in Rosedale.

0:38:54.7

AE: In Rosedale?

0:38:55.4

BP: Yeah. And most of his sisters and brothers are here in Rosedale, so I know them very well.

0:39:01.3

AE: Do you have any idea of what your brother thought about him opening his place down there? Or did he even know about it at all?

0:39:07.9

BP: Oh, yeah. [*Emphasis Added*] Yeah, he knew it.

0:39:11.7

AE: [*Laughs*] Okay.

0:39:12.2

BP: Oh, yeah. I--I'm not going to say my brother didn't help him you know. I don't know. Joe wasn't that type of person. He didn't care about you opening your business, you know.

0:39:30.4

AE: Well, I found--and all the people that I've spoken with--that the tamale recipe is so valued sentimentally and then also economically speaking because there was such an investment made a long time ago--to get the recipe to begin with--and then it stayed in families and has been kept tight. And there's also, I guess, so much competition in the Delta when you get around between tamale vendors and makers that they're all--they want to keep their identity, you know.

0:39:55.6

BP: Right.

0:39:56.5

AE: And keep [their tamales] different. And so I wonder if over the years--I mean I've talked to a couple people who have sold their recipes to a few people but then found out that--that the people didn't want to spend the time actually making them, so never really came of it. But I wonder if Joe over the years ever sold or gave away his recipe that you know of.

0:40:16.0

BP: I don't know. That, I don't know. I've had several people ask me for it, but they want to buy it, you know. But I'm not saying that I won't right now. *[Laughs]*

0:40:33.6

AE: I hear you. *[Laughs]*

0:40:34.1

BP: *[Laughs]* Right now--yeah; but no one around here--there were a man from Kansas. He's from Kansas City; he asked Joe for it. And then there were--someone from Memphis asked me, and a couple people from Texas and Florida asked me if I would sell it to them.

0:41:04.9

AE: And?

0:41:05.5

BP: I told them I didn't know. I really don't know. I would never say no because I don't know. I looked at who would come behind me to take the business over because I don't think anyone else is here--you know, close family.

0:41:28.4

AE: So is that something you would consider when the time comes--to sell the recipe and the business?

0:41:33.0

BP: Right.

0:41:35.6

AE: To the right person. Yeah.

0:41:38.1

BP: Uh-hm, yeah. I have offers for the business now.

0:41:42.4

AE: Really?

0:41:42.3

BP: Uh-hm, because they--I guess they thought that I didn't want to run the business. But I wanted to stay and do it myself for a while.

0:41:56.3

AE: Keep it in family?

0:41:56.3

BP: Right, uh-hm.

0:41:58.6

AE: So tell me about the actual space that we're in. Has it changed much over the thirty years?

0:42:05.3

BP: No; the decorations--the painting, I did this when I took over. *[Laughs]*

0:42:13.4

AE: It needed it, huh? *[Laughs]*

0:42:17.3

BP: I put the floors in when I took over. Because I couldn't get the owner to do it. So I told him--it really needed painting. It was just dark. You know, I said it needed a lot of work. It needs more. But I asked someone to do it, but they didn't do it really right, but it looks much better than what it did. But I told him when I--I'm going to do some more work to it.

0:42:54.6

AE: What do you plan to do?

0:42:55.2

BP: Huh?

0:42:56.5

AE: What else do you plan to do?

0:42:57.6

BP: It needs a lot more work done to it, but--he's building me a public bathroom, the owner is. And he's been working on it for two months, and he hasn't finished it yet. So I think I will have to go and get someone to do that, you know--doing the bathroom so-- There's some more things. I would like to change it around to utilize--a lot of the space is not utilized, and it probably needs changing around some. I was trying to get him to sell it to me so I could really go and--but he won't sell it to me. Because I would like to fix it up on the outside and inside. But--and they tell me well, you can't do too much to it because this is--well, they look--I don't know. But I'm saying even after it's designated as a landmark, you still can fix up a landmark. **[Laughs]**

0:44:02.3

AE: Yeah.

0:44:02.6

BP: You know?

0:44:04.4

AE: Yeah.

0:44:04.6

BP: So you don't have to change anything. It can stay the same but you can still paint it and fix it up. So I don't know--**[Sneezes]**--excuse me. That's one reason why he doesn't want to sell it, you know. But there are people that sell this building all over the internet.

0:44:25.9

AE: Well speaking of change, that old sign that was out front [for the White Front Café], when did that come down? Do you remember?

0:44:32.2

BP: He took it down--the owner took it down to fix the front of the building, and when he took it down to fix the front of the building someone stole it.

0:44:42.2

AE: Did he take it down and just leave it leaning on the side or something?

0:44:47.7

BP: I guess he did, I don't know. It's been many years ago when he did that, but I think that's what happened. And someone took the sign. They sold it to someone in Cleveland. But he didn't pursue it so--.

0:45:08.4

AE: Hmm. And so now there's just kind of a small arrangement of smaller signs out there. Do you think that--that will be one of the improvements he'll do is get a new sign--big sign?

0:45:19.5

BP: I'm not sure. I'm not sure, but I'm not going to do a lot if he doesn't sell it.

0:45:29.2

AE: [*Laughs*] Right.

0:45:30.1

BP: [*Laughs*] You know, I'll do some, you know.

0:45:34.2

AE: Right. What about this jukebox over here in the corner? Is that--does it work? Was it ever in--?

0:45:38.9

BP: Yes; it does.

0:45:40.0

AE: Yeah?

0:45:40.5

BP: It works, but it doesn't take money, so you have to use keys. So when I first came in I was cleaning up the place, I threw away everything, including the keys that go to it. So a friend of mine went on the internet and found me some keys. So you have to unlock it and push the button and everything.

0:46:04.0

AE: So is that something that was used on the weekends or something when people come in and hang out?

0:46:08.4

BP: Well, I think he had that when he was in the other location around the corner. That was in there. So when he moved out he just took the jukebox and brought it around here. So they used to play it, but I--they only play it on Christmas now.

0:46:29.6

AE: Do you have Christmas parties in here?

0:46:30.3

BP: Because we have a lot of-- No.

0:46:33.3

AE: No?

0:46:34.1

BP: We have a lot of Christmas carols on there.

0:46:36.8

AE: Oh, really? [*Laughs*] What other kind of things do they have on there?

0:46:40.6

BP: They have mostly Blues.

0:46:41.2

AE: Yeah?

0:46:42.3

BP: Yeah.

0:46:43.5

AE: Okay.

0:46:44.2

BP: A lot of them. But I just--it plays 45s but if I had--when I was living in Chicago, I had tons of 45s, but I don't know what happened to them. I don't even know where I left them. But I'm saying--if I had some I can bring them down and put them on here, you know.

0:47:07.4

AE: But usually all day in here y'all are entertained by the television anymore, huh?

0:47:10.6

BP: That's about it. Sometimes we'll turn it on. Some friends come over sometimes, and we'll turn it on and just sit around and listen to some of the old songs, uh-hm. But we don't play it too often.

[*Short pause*]

0:47:35.9

AE: Well, is there anything that I haven't asked you that comes to mind about--?

0:47:39.4

BP: No, not that I can think of. You want some more tamales?

0:47:42.2

AE: No, I think I'm good. This was a great taste. I've had--had them [here] before, but it's been probably about a year, I think.

0:47:47.5

BP: Oh, yeah?

0:47:48.4

AE: They're good; they're spicier than most. I like that. They have a--.

0:47:52.0

BP: You do?

0:47:52.7

AE: They have a good spice to them. Do most people who come in eat them with crackers do you know? Or have you heard of weird things that people do?

0:47:59.9

BP: You know I--I used to not keep crackers, but so many people would come in and ask for them, so I started keeping them here. But no, most of the people around here don't eat them with crackers. They just eat them. But most of the tourists that come through, they like crackers so--.

0:48:19.1

AE: Really? Huh. I guess word spread somehow that way. That's interesting.

0:48:22.0

BP: And a few people around Rosedale ask for crackers, too.

0:48:31.3

AE: Do you know about fried tamales in the Delta?

0:48:33.1

BP: Know about who?

0:48:33.4

AE: Fried hot tamales in the Delta?

0:48:35.7

BP: No.

0:48:36.4

AE: There are a couple places that are doing that.

0:48:37.4

BP: Really?

0:48:39.3

AE: In Clarksdale they do it and in Bourbon, south of Leland, the Bourbon Mall Restaurant down there, they fry hot tamales.

0:48:48.5

BP: Oh.

0:48:48.7

AE: They're good.

0:48:49.5

BP: They are? [**Laughs**]

0:48:50.3

AE: Uh-huh. They serve it with Ranch dressing to dip it in.

0:48:52.9

BP: Really? [**Surprised**]

0:48:54.5

AE: Uh-hm, yeah. If you try [someone else's] hot tamale, you need to try a fried one 'cause they're--they're good--different. [**Laughs**]

0:49:02.8

BP: I wonder how they fry them?

0:49:05.9

AE: Well I think--well you should try it, definitely--doing it yourself.

0:49:07.7

BP: Uh-hm.

0:49:10.2

AE: They--evidently the secret is--not so much a secret, but that when you fry them you fry them frozen.

0:49:16.0

BP: Oh, okay.

0:49:16.7

AE: Take it out of the shuck and then fry it frozen. And they use a beer batter down there. I don't know what they use in Clarksdale. But, yeah, one day when you're bored in here, get you some grease. *[Laughs]*

0:49:27.9

BP: That's amazing.

0:49:31.7

AE: Yeah.

0:49:32.7

BP: Okay. I haven't tried that. I've heard of it, though, because someone told me there was a restaurant over in Cleveland, they served fried tamales. But I never tasted any. I don't know if they still serve them or not over there.

0:49:51.4

AE: Do you--does your family eat hot tamales at home ever? Do you take--do you take some home?

0:49:57.1

BP: I have a sister that's here now, she eats too many of them. I mean she can eat them every day. She loves them. She has a son that eats them. They all eat them because she's--she told me she's leaving Sunday, so she's taking fifteen dozen back with her.

0:50:22.5

AE: Where does she live?

0:50:23.2

BP: In Chicago.

0:50:24.3

AE: Okay.

0:50:26.4

BP: Uh-hmm, yeah.

0:50:26.2

AE: What about your mother? Does she like hot tamales?

0:50:30.1

BP: She does but she--she doesn't eat too much spicy food. She may taste one or two. That's the most she'll eat.

0:50:40.1

AE: What did she think about Joe having this business all these years?

0:50:44.6

BP: Oh, she loved it. My mother is a very outgoing woman. She's ninety-seven, but she goes everywhere. They have a youth--I mean, a center where they go every day. She goes there every day. She goes to church every Sunday. She pulls me out of bed on Sunday morning when I don't want to get up. **[Laughs]**

0:51:10.3

AE: **[Laughs]** Has she ever spent much time in here? Has she--?

0:51:14.8

BP: No. No, she hasn't. Um-hmm. I think she's been here a couple times. She hasn't been here too many times because she can't--she walks but it's hard for her to climb those steps out there.

0:51:35.6

AE: Was it important, do you think, for your brother to stay in Rosedale all these years? Was it something that he made a point to do?

0:51:42.3

BP: I don't think he ever wanted to leave.

0:51:44.6

AE: Yeah?

0:51:45.1

BP: He never talked about leaving. He always--because when we worked on the farm, he never did work on the farm with us. He--well gosh, he got married back in forty-something—1940-something, he got married and he was working at the department store then. So I think he just enjoyed Rosedale. He wouldn't have never left Rosedale, uh-um, no.

0:52:21.5

AE: What did the town of Rosedale--how did they support your family when your brother passed?

0:52:31.8

BP: All the way. They were great. I mean they were truly great. The town, the surrounding communities, you know like the--Dr. Outlaw and Dr. Brown from Delta State [University in Cleveland, MS], they were there at the funeral. And there were some more. And like all the younger people that grew up here in Rosedale that knew Joe as a child--when they were children, they sent telegrams from all over. So yeah, they were great. They went all the way out, uh-hmm.

0:53:14.6

AE: Well-loved.

0:53:17.2

BP: Yeah. And I think he loved them just as much as they loved him.

0:53:24.6

AE: Well I--I sure am sorry and it is a shame that we weren't doing this project a year ago. But as I mentioned before we started that, you know, he still is an inspiration for us to do this project today, so I really appreciate you taking the time to sit with me.

0:53:42.6

BP: You're welcome. I'm sure he would have talked more than I did. *[Laughs]*

0:53:45.6

AE: *[Laughs]* Well and his--his story has been [told] quite a few times by a few people, I think.

0:53:51.5

BP: Oh, yeah.

0:53:52.3

AE: But the history is important, and it's a very interesting history, so we want to make sure we get it--get it all while we can.

0:53:58.1

BP: Well that's true, and that's nice of you, uh-hm.

0:54:05.9

[End Barbara Pope]