

DOUG WALKER
Gridely's BBQ - Bartlett, TN

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Location: Gridely's BBQ - Bartlett, TN
Interviewer: Rien Fertel for the Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Project: Southern Barbecue Trail – Tennessee

[Begin Doug Walker-Gridley's Interview]

00:00:00

Rien Fertel: This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is Wednesday, July 16, 2008, a little after 2:00. We are at Gridley's with Mr. Doug Walker. Gridley's is at 6842 Stage Road, Bartlett, Tennessee which is a suburb just east of Memphis. So I'm here with Mr. Walker, and Mr. Walker; please introduce yourself and give us your birth date.

00:00:30

Doug Walker: Hello; my name is Doug Walker, and August 16, 1960 is my birthday.

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RF: Okay; and can you tell us your—your position here at Gridley's?

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DW: Me and my wife own Gridley's. We bought it about two years ago.

00:00:44

RF: Okay; so you own Gridley's. Gridley's has a long Memphis tradition. Let's get what you know about that; let's—let's start with what you know about who founded Gridley's, who was Gridley—?

00:00:59

DW: Mr. Clyde Gridley started Gridley's. He worked for Loeb's Barbecue and I think he was one of his General Managers and Mr. Loeb(s) was getting out of the barbecue business and he told Mr. Gridley, he said I'll sell you this store. So Mr. Gridley started on Summer Avenue and within two or three years Mr. Clyde and his wife did so well that they moved down to the French Village. And it just took off from there.

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RF: Where is the French Village?

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DW: It's—it's on down from Bryant's—.

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RF: Still on Summer Avenue?

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DW: Still on Summer Avenue and it's called the French Village; it's just a little shopping center.

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RF: Okay; so the original Gridley's on Summer was that kind of—Summer is—Summer Avenue passes north of Poplar which is the kind of a main street—trying to describe the geography of Memphis here.

00:01:52

DW: Right.

00:01:52

RF: Summer goes from west—west to east?

00:01:56

DW: It's like parallel to Poplar Avenue—Summer.

00:01:58

RF: Okay; right and the original location—where on Summer was it; was it more west, more downtown?

00:02:03

DW: Yeah; more west—real, real close to downtown.

00:02:07

RF: Okay; oh real close okay and then the—the Village location was farther east?

00:02:12

DW: Yeah; and I think there is a Mexican restaurant there now, so—. But he—his—his sales, they said lines used to be out the door. They said on Friday and Saturday night—he was really the first—he was a visionary. He was really the first barbecue guy that gave barbecue some class, and he made a big Gridley's. Most barbecue restaurants prior to him were smaller and he come out with the concept of bigger—bigger restaurants.

00:02:42

RF: So he almost went from like juke-joint kind of barbecue joints to sit-down restaurants?

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DW: To sit-down.

00:02:47

RF: How do you remember him doing this?

00:02:51

DW: Well what I remember was that when I first—a friend of mine first introduced me to Gridley’s, and we went by there and I was real impressed with the guys dressed up in tux and serving barbecue. That kind of just threw me you know. **[Laughs]** And—and we—and then they would wait on you like your—your tea glasses; there would be a guy standing up there and an older guy and he would point to them that your tea was low and somebody would get over on that table, so he added a lot of class to barbecue that—that wasn’t there prior to Mr. Gridley.

00:03:23

RF: So the waiters would be in tuxedos?

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DW: They would be in tuxedos.

00:03:26

RF: Would—would they have tablecloths on the tables?

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DW: Oh yeah tablecloths, and when you got through eating they would have hot towels that they would bring you to wipe your hands. They had a big thing that they set out back that they just kept the towels in and they would come and they would hand you—they would have a tray and it would be hot towels they would hand you to wash your hands after you got through eating barbecue.

00:03:47

RF: So and you—when we spoke a couple of weeks ago you said that he might have gotten some of these waiters from the Peabody?

00:03:54

DW: The Peabody—that's what I heard; he got them from Peabody.

00:03:57

RF: He would like—he'd hire them when they were off?

00:04:00

DW: I think he worked schedules around them at the Peabody, and like when they wasn't working there they was working for him.

00:04:05

RF: Do you remember the first time you went to Gridley's or ever going there when you were younger?

00:04:09

DW: Yeah; it was—it was about in '79—'79, '80 something along there and I was real impressed with the barbecue and the taste of it and every time we would come to Memphis we wanted to go to Gridley's, so—. You know when this come up for sale and I found out about it, I love cooking anyway; and when it come up for sale that's when me and the wife decided we would purchase it and we wanted to bring the chain back to what it used to be.

00:04:40

RF: Right; well before we get into the history of what happened between Gridley's and—and you know purchasing the restaurant, where are you from? You mentioned when you came into town; where are you—?

00:04:51

DW: From the Mississippi Delta.

00:04:53

RF: What town exactly?

00:04:54

DW: Greenwood.

00:04:54

RF: Greenwood so that's—is it on the river?

00:04:59

DW: No; Greenville is on the river. We're about 100 miles east—I mean 50 miles east of Greenville.

00:05:03

RF: Okay; is there any sort of barbecue culture in Greenwood?

00:05:07

DW: Yeah; a small one—it's a small presence there and one of my dad's cousins cooked barbecue for 25 years.

00:05:15

RF: In a restaurant or in the backyard?

00:05:17

DW: He did it at a restaurant and then he just started going around from different towns and then just did it there in Greenwood in just like a little trailer and everybody knew to go by and eat the barbecue from him.

00:05:26

RF: Do you remember how—how he cooked it or anything special about the way he cooked it?

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DW: Yeah; he cooked it on the old-fashioned pits.

00:05:32

RF: Like a barrel pit?

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DW: Barrel pit with hickory and you know to give it that good flavor, real good; he served real good barbecue.

00:05:40

RF: What else do you remember eating in Greenwood whether with your family, your parents—
?

00:05:46

DW: You talking barbecue?

00:05:49

RF: Oh not just barbecue, just any sort of food—any?

00:05:52

DW: Crystal Grill; it's—it's—I've had five generations eat this one restaurant in Greenwood.

00:05:56

RF: Can you describe it; what is it?

00:05:59

DW: It's just like a—they serve steak, they serve chicken strips. It's just a wide menu, and I'm friends with Johnny Ballas and the second—that's the second generation, and they have been running this thing about 60 years—the same family.

00:06:17

RF: And it's still there; you can still eat there?

00:06:18

DW: Still there—still there and—and the food has always impressed me there. They have prime rib. They have chicken and dressing. They have club sandwich—just a real broad menu, so I've—I've been eating there for—ever since I was about six years-old. *[Laughs]* So—so we're the fifth generation. My great-grandfather ate at this place.

00:06:42

RF: So let's—let's go back to Clyde Gridley. So he—he worked at Loeb's which was kind of Memphis fast-food kind of a chain. He made it upscale barbecue if we can call it that; do you remember anything special about the meat he cooked? Was it—well was it sandwiches and ribs? What was it?

00:06:56

DW: Sandwiches and ribs, and his beans tasted different. You know a lot of people just open up a can and they pour it out, a lot of the beans, and he come up with recipes that were different,

you know that weren't—that weren't ordinary you know and the sauce was a milder sauce and then he had a hot sauce. And so if you wanted a barbecue with hot sauce on it you—you got that and it was just—it was different. He—a lot of people put fat in everything in their barbecue and he had guys and they'd chop it up and they would go through the fat and they removed it so you got a leaner piece of meat. And that impressed me too 'cause it's—it's nothing worse than getting a big old wad of fat when you're eating.

00:07:37

RF: Right.

00:07:40

DW: So—

00:07:40

RF: And then something happened in—in the Gridley's name. Can you describe kind of what happened in the—in the '80s?

00:07:46

DW: Yeah; Mr. Gridley passed away and I don't know if—if they didn't know how to run it or if it was family squabbles but something happened and the chain kind of downsized after his death.

00:08:02

RF: And did they sell it?

00:08:03

DW: Yeah; they sold it to a group of investors and they had it for 20 years. And then the investors; they had an Operations man and they had a group of investors and what happened was that the Operations Manager's wife got sick and when he—he got sick he told them he wasn't going to be able to operate them no more. So it scared them; they had never been in there and never actually ran the restaurant. So the leases were coming up and it was just bad timing, so they decided to liquidate. And if it hadn't been for Doc Coley that bought this unit Gridley's wouldn't even have existed no more.

00:08:41

RF: That's this location on Stage?

00:08:42

DW: That's this location, right.

00:08:44

RF: Who was this—this kind of Manager that you—?

00:08:47

DW: Bob Peterson; we've got a sandwich named after him—Bad Bob we call it.

00:08:53

RF: So Bob Peterson, he—he kind of ran all the Gridley's—?

00:08:55

DW: He ran all—he was the Operations man.

00:08:57

RF: Do you know—do you remember how many Gridley's there were at the high point?

00:09:01

DW: There were—there was two in Atlanta; there was one in Jackson, Tennessee; there was about six in Memphis and there was one in Jackson, Mississippi.

00:09:10

RF: Oh wow; okay so it was outside the State and everything?

00:09:12

DW: Yeah; but it was a growing chain up until Mr. Clyde died.

00:09:19

RF: And do you know how he died? I've heard—I've heard—

00:09:21

DW: I think it was in a car wreck on the interstate.

00:09:26

RF: Okay; and tell me about Doc Coley. Doc Coley bought just one location—this one on Stage?

00:09:29

DW: Yeah; Doc Coley played golf with Jack Ivy—that was one of the money guys in Gridley’s, one of the owners, and he told him—he said you know Bob, the Operations Manager, his wife is sick and we’re fixing to liquidate all the Gridley’s and sell the equipment. And Doc said I’d like to buy it, you know the one on Stage Road, and let my daughter run it. And they had it for three years and I think his daughter decided she didn’t exactly like the restaurant business. You know it’s a tough—the restaurant business is a tough business, so—.

00:10:02

RF: And so she sold it to you?

00:10:05

DW: Yeah; Doc sold it to me. He actually owned it and his daughter run it, and he sold it to me.

00:10:10

RF: And in which month and year did you acquire it?

00:10:12

DW: I think it was October of 2005.

00:10:19

RF: And the recipes, the menu—do they date back to the original—?

00:10:25

DW: Date back to Mr. Clyde. There's some things and I've got recipes on that we're going to do in the new store like Brunswick Stew, Gumbo—that we haven't done in the smaller location because we just don't have the kitchen space.

00:10:42

RF: Okay; well before we talk about your—your plans which are really exciting, can you—can you tell us about what is the Gridley's Barbecue? What—how would you describe the barbecue that you cook here?

00:10:55

DW: I would describe it as the *taste of Memphis* and that's our—you know that's our—that—that's a trademark that we use—that Gridley's is the taste of Memphis. We go back with these recipes and we have people come from all over the country that eat—that ate at Gridley's when they were younger, from Florida, from Los Angeles that when they come back in town they come to this little restaurant. And it's surprising to me. And then when we ship stuff in December all over the country; Ohio—slabs of ribs everywhere. And it just kind of shocked me the brand recognition that we still have and that people call up and say we—put it this way; we—we open at 11:00 on Sundays and we got a phone call on Saturday night. A man from Chicago wanted some barbecue shrimp. So his daughter was coming through earlier that morning, Sunday morning, so we opened up early to send him a 100-dozen barbecue shrimp.

00:11:56

RF: Wow.

00:11:57

DW: To Chicago.

00:11:58

RF: Right; so you do ribs. What—what kind of—what cut of the pig goes on your—?

00:12:03

DW: The St. Louis—we use the St. Louis style cut rib.

00:12:07

RF: Okay; and what kind of cut goes on your sandwiches?

00:12:10

DW: Oh we use butts.

00:12:11

RF: Okay.

00:12:11

DW: We used to use shoulders back in the old days when we had the bigger pits, but you know now we have the newer style pits and we use butts.

00:12:19

RF: Do you mean—what do you mean; do you mean Gridley’s used to use shoulders?

00:12:22

DW: Uh-hm; and they changed probably 10—15 years ago.

00:12:26

RF: Okay; but you weren’t—were you in the restaurant business before you took this place?

00:12:29

DW: No; I just loved cooking and I love eating even better. [*Laughs*]

00:12:34

RF: Well we’ll have to talk about that. Did you—what did you do before—before the last two years?

00:12:38

DW: I owned an industrial supply house in Mississippi in—in Greenwood, and NAFTA come along and all the plants moved to China and Mexico and wiped me out so I always loved cooking, and so I was just looking in the restaurant business. And then when this come up I was just like floored; it was like awesome that Gridley’s that I had ate at for all these years had come up for sale.

00:13:02

RF: Where did you hear about it or read about it?

00:13:05

DW: Well I tell you; I come by here and ate and I told the girl that worked here, I said—I said could you get the owner to call me? And he called me and I said would you be interested in selling Gridley's? And at first Doc said no; he wouldn't be interested. And so about six or eight months later I got a phone call and he said my daughter is really not liking the restaurant business and he said, I think I'm ready to sell. He said, I'm in my 80s and I'm ready to sell.

00:13:31

RF: Is it tough moving from Greenwood, Mississippi to Memphis?

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DW: It was tough; I'm—I'm a country boy and it was tough. It's like a shock to your system when you come up here but we've got—we've got the store in Conway we just opened three weeks ago and that's more my speed. But we've got—we've got to expand the chain; we have got to have a presence here in Memphis, yeah; so—.

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RF: Did you—what did you cook at home? You said you really loved to cook. What did you cook for—?

00:14:01

DW: Steaks, barbecue, ribs, gumbo—just all kinds of food. It's nothing like sitting around the grill and cooking.

00:14:11

RF: So are you the cook at home or was it your wife?

00:14:14

DW: Me and her both. Now she's an excellent cook now. She—she cooks homemade pies and cakes and stuff and she's excellent. She cooks half the time in here and I cook half the time.

00:14:23

RF: Oh okay; so she helps here?

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DW: Oh yeah; oh yeah, and she's really the brains behind the operation, so—. [*Laughs*]

00:14:31

RF: And what is her name?

00:14:32

DW: Jamie—Jamie Walker.

00:14:34

RF: Okay; and well tell us—you've mentioned a couple of times about expansion. You just opened a second store; can you talk about that?

00:14:40

DW: Yeah; we just opened the second store in Conway and we got great brand recognition. People see the sign and they come out and they said is this the same Gridley's that was in Memphis? And I said yeah; and then after they ate, they go, oh my Lord it is. I ate there when I was—one of the guys said, I ate when I was in Dental School in Memphis and another guy said look; I lived in Memphis years ago and I ate at—I ate at Gridley's, and I went wow. I was surprised we had such brand recognition.

00:15:05

RF: Where—where is Conway, Arkansas?

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DW: It's about 20 miles north of Little Rock.

00:15:09

RF: Okay.

00:15:09

DW: If you—it's just right off 40. You go right off 40 and you turn off 65 going up to Branson and we're two miles out on the left at Pickles Gap. It's a big tourist destination.

00:15:20

RF: So between Little Rock and—and Branson it has a lot of traffic?

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DW: It has a lot of traffic, lot of—we have a lot of tourists come by and they said they'll be back on their next trip, that—that the barbecue was great, the ribs were great. I had a guy that said, man this is the best brisket I've ever ate. I said I appreciate it. I said we work hard. A lot of owners ain't actually doing the cooking you know and a lot of the restaurants they have people that does it for them, but we're doing all the cooking in both restaurants.

00:15:54

RF: So you're the Pit Master here?

00:15:56

DW: I'm the Pit Master.

00:16:00

RF: So tell me about how you cook a butt here; how do you start off? Do you—do you season it before it goes on the pit? Tell me about—tell me about the process from—

00:16:06

DW: Season it—season it with a seasoning and then we cook it for about 14 hours at about 200-degrees, long and slow.

00:16:18

RF: How much does a butt weigh when you get it?

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DW: They vary; it depends on what time of year. They can go anywhere from seven to ten pounds and then yield out of that—you're only going to get about 75 to 80-percent after the fat comes out.

00:16:36

RF: Where—where on the pig is the butt?

00:16:40

DW: Hmm; towards the rear.

00:16:43

RF: Okay; and excuse me—so you season it before it goes on the pit? What kind of pit do you use?

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DW: Southern Pride and we—we use hickory wood. You know some people, you know, use a variety, but Gridley's has always just used hickory wood.

00:17:00

RF: One hundred—one hundred-percent hickory?

00:17:02

DW: One hundred-percent hickory and we soak the—we soak the hickory wood so it will be wet, so it will smoke more so you can get that good hickory flavor in the product.

00:17:11

RF: And the—the Southern Pride, how does it work? Is it a gas lighting, electric lighting?

00:17:17

DW: It's—it's gas and it keeps the temperature uniform. So you get a uniform temperature and you still get the taste of the hickory too. You put hickory and charcoal in it and you get the smoked flavor but you get the consistency. In the—in the old days, the pit would catch on fire and blaze up; they'd go up, they'd go down. You couldn't get a consistency. But in the newer pits of the day you can get an exact product so that each time the consumer comes in he knows exactly what he's getting.

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RF: And does it have a dial where you can set the temperature?

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DW: Uh-hm; it has a dial and you just set it on there and you let it cook like in the old days, the Pit Master had to be there the whole 14 hours but now we can put them on at 10:00—9:00 or 10:00 at night and in the morning we take them off, so—.

00:18:09

RF: Right; and—and tell me about the sandwich. Is it—is it chopped; does it come with slaw?

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DW: Well we say, you get it your way at Gridley's. You can get it chopped; you can get it pulled. We have white; we have dark; we have finely chopped; we have chunky but—and a lot of people when they come in you know we just tell them, hey, you just tell us what you want you know because—. And believe me; Memphis is funny about barbecue. Some people they want it pulled. Some people want it chopped. Some people want it chopped fine. **[Laughs]** Barbecue is serious in Memphis, Tennessee. **[Laughs]**

00:18:44

RF: Yeah; and well let's talk about that. Let's talk about barbecue in Memphis. Well is it—is it that serious anywhere else—Arkansas, Mississippi?

00:18:51

DW: I have never seen anywhere that it's more serious than around here. **[Laughs]** We—we ran out of sauce for two or three weeks and buddy, people was mad. I had an old guy and he was cussing at me he was so mad.

00:19:08

RF: How do you run out of sauce?

00:19:10

DW: Well the—the people that have made it for us all these years it—they had upped their—their volume that it took for us to get it, so when I come in, the Doc said he wasn't going to get it. So we had about a three to four weeks lapse where we didn't have our sauce; it was terrible.

00:19:27

RF: Well what did you have to—did you have to make some from scratch or make something—buy something?

00:19:30

DW: We just—we just bought some and just used it but it was—it was awful. And it was—it was a terrible time when I first bought it but we wanted to get everything back original. There was some stuff that wasn't exactly like it used to be and we wanted to get everything back to the way it used to be. You know there was a football coach one time that said that—that they had just lost a game and he said—he pulled them in, and he said this is a football. We're going to start from the beginning. So that's kind of what we did; we went back to the manuals, and this is a barbecue restaurant. *[Laughs]*

00:20:04

RF: What did you have to go back and—and change and make original?

00:20:08

DW: Well we went back to the way he cooked things, like a lot of—lot of people were—when I come in weren't doing things the way—the cook wasn't doing things the way Mr. Gridley had—had it laid out to do, like sometimes they'd cook with hickory and sometimes they wouldn't and it was just—it was no consistency. You know I've heard if you're going to serve a bad hamburger serve it every time.

00:20:32

RF: [*Laughs*] And—what was I going to ask? Oh the sauce, the Gridley sauce, is it the same sauce and how would you describe it?

00:20:43

DW: It's the same sauce. It's—it's kind of got a sweet taste and it's unique from any other sauce that I've ever tasted. It—it's kind of a sweet, and you know we have our own slaw mix that's made for us, and they all just blend together and they just kind of explode in your mouth when you eat it. It's—I've ate a lot of barbecue and we've got good barbecue. And hey, now there's other people in Memphis that have got good barbecue too. I—I like to go around and see what my competition is doing 'cause you know if you—if you're not watching your competition maybe they're doing something a little bit different—not that I want to change it, but that I wanted to add. Like next year we're going to add Memphis sweet that I'm working on now—a barbecue sauce.

00:21:29

RF: How would you describe that?

00:21:31

DW: Kind of a molasses sweet taste you know for the ones—you know more of the Texas style. I mean we'll still have our original and we'll still have our hot but we'll—this will just be an add-on.

00:21:44

RF: So you talked about checking out your competition and—and other good places to eat barbecue. What makes good Memphis barbecue good?

00:21:52

DW: I think just caring about the product, and you know a lot of the ones that I like the owner was actually in there. It wasn't run like a production line, you know and people that really actually care about what they're doing you know. Some places you go into like the—you know McDonald's, they sell more hamburgers than anybody else in the country, but they were voted the worst hamburger. So you know go figure; [*Laughs*] but just to try to serve a good product and consistency all the time you know.

00:22:30

RF: And tell me about—I want to ask questions about a few other products on the menu. There's—there's a shrimp. Can you tell me about that? You've already mentioned that.

00:22:37

DW: Barbecue shrimp it's like famous; it's like people drive—I've got a customer that drives 100 miles twice a month to get our barbecue shrimp. And it just shocks me; it's—it's not barbecue. It's like a Cajun in butter sauce and it is—it's delicious and then a lot of people take our homemade bread and they just soak it up into the sauce and finish eating it.

00:23:02

RF: So you make your own bread here?

00:23:02

DW: We make our own bread—homemade bread.

00:23:06

RF: Where does the barbecue shrimp recipe come from? Does it go way back to—?

00:23:09

DW: Way back to Mr. Gridley. Mr. Clyde cooked in the Army and just developed all this stuff, I guess just home cooking. You know just like me; I used to watch my grandmother cook, so you know and she had some of the best dressing and you know just—just liking to eat you know.

00:23:29

RF: What do you remember her cooking?

00:23:32

DW: Chicken and dressing, pot-pies, roasts, peas, homemade peas, cornbread, laying down food—after you eat it, it makes you want to lay down. *[Laughs]*

00:23:47

RF: Okay; oh and—oh the—the brisket—you do serve brisket here?

00:23:55

DW: We do serve brisket.

00:23:56

RF: It's—I've seen that a couple places serve brisket here in Memphis but it's still a rare thing. It's mostly a pork town. How—how often does brisket sell?

00:24:04

DW: About 10-percent of our business is probably brisket. It's little but we still want to offer that to—'cause I had a guy come in from Texas and he wanted beef ribs and I said we don't have beef ribs. And so I went over to talk to him afterwards, and he said this is the nastiest ribs I've ever tasted. I said I'm sorry, sir; I said—I said you know can I give you your money back? He said, no, it's all this Memphis barbecue. He said, in Texas we serve beef ribs. And I said well I'm sorry. I said sir; I would probably starve to death if I served beef ribs in Memphis. **[Laughs]**

00:24:39

RF: So who—who is ordering the brisket—the people from Texas that are out—the people from outside Memphis?

00:24:48

DW: I think we have more health conscious people, maybe blood pressure people and—'cause I've talked to several and they say, well I eat beef and stuff like that, so I think they're the ones doing more of the brisket. But it's still like 90—90-percent of our business is still pork and the brisket don't taste like the pork.

00:25:04

RF: I want to ask about one thing. You—there's something—something y'all serve here that I haven't seen anywhere else and that's you have sweet tea and super sweet tea. I've never seen super sweet tea.

00:25:17

DW: That's the women in here.

00:25:20

RF: What does that mean?

00:25:20

DW: That means my wife and Sarah and they—they had people come in and they asked for more sweeter tea, so they obliged.

00:25:33

RF: So you just put extra sweet—?

00:25:35

DW: Extra sweet and people come in and get that stuff by the gallons. I mean I'm shocked.

00:25:37

RF: Which sells more?

00:25:41

DW: I'd say the extra sweet and then if you—look; if you don't want to drink it you can use it on your pancakes. *[Laughs]*

00:25:48

RF: It's that thick—it's that thick?

00:25:49

DW: It's that—it's that sweet. *[Laughs]*

00:25:51

RF: Really? Do you—do you serve pancakes here?

00:25:56

DW: Oh no, no; but I'm saying you know you could use it on pancakes.

00:25:58

RF: All right; and well tell me about—tell me about your plans. I mean, you just opened a second location just in the past couple weeks. Tell me when you opened it exactly, the one in Arkansas.

00:26:07

DW: About two weeks ago; it's doing really, really good. It's more—it's a bigger Gridley's. It's more of a lodge type setting; it's got red—red tablecloth, like picnic tablecloths, wood bench. It used to be an old grist mill and it's over in Conway, Arkansas.

00:26:28

RF: Was it a restaurant before when you—?

00:26:29

DW: It was a restaurant and I was out looking. I'm a junker; you can see by the stuff on—all around here. I stop in and try to find old stuff that you know that when people—I love Cracker Barrel. When you go in there's stuff on the walls and there's stuff to look at and I like that concept and so my wife said, I'm through with this wall and so she said now you're working on the Conway walls. *[Laughs]*

00:26:54

RF: And so what are your plans? Do—do you want to bring Gridley's back even farther; do you see more of expansion?

00:27:03

DW: I want to bring them—I want to bring them coast to coast. I want to bring them—I want to introduce Memphis barbecue to New York, you know—Los Angeles, 'cause we have people from—we had a guy from New Jersey and he said, oh my God. He said, I didn't even know about this stuff. He said this is fine. He said, we don't have food like this up there in New Jersey or New York. And so it really shocks me, if you serve good food it don't matter where they're from. You know we had some people from Brazil and they were like shocked—barbecue—shocked. I guess people come—what do they do? When they come to Memphis they go to Elvis' house and they eat barbecue. That's—that's the two big things in Memphis.

00:27:43

RF: Right; but what do you think makes Memphis barbecue different from Alabama, Mississippi, Carolina barbecue?

00:27:50

DW: You know I don't know; I think the roots run real deep here in Memphis. You know somebody needs to try to figure this thing out and go back as far as we can go. I think you guys are kind of working on that now to where people know where did—where did these things start. You know a lot of times you know you have to go back to old-timers 'cause they can tell you—they can tell you a lot. You go back to the people that are in their 80s—or 85 you know that's like—that's like how you really find out how it was. And I think—I think the roots run deep here in Memphis for barbecue. And it's serious; it's serious business.

00:28:27

RF: Do you think you have to eat barbecue to be a—a Memphsonian? Do you have to like it?

00:28:35

DW: I think if you don't, I wouldn't tell nobody. [*Laughs*]

00:28:42

RF: All right; fair enough. I want to bring up one thing you said to me a couple weeks ago. You said barbecue is a weird thing; what did you mean by that?

00:28:49

DW: I mean that it's weird because people are so serious about it. You know and—and they'll go like and once—once somebody gets—they're used to eating at one barbecue place, they don't like changing. It's—it's a strange thing; there is such loyalty in the barbecue business that I can't explain it, so it's—it's weird. Like they'll say, I've been eating at Gridley's since I was seven years-old you know and I'm 40-something now. You know that's—and that's kind of strange to me 'cause it ain't like well you know I'm—I'm going to eat at McDonald's. You know the burger places aren't like the barbecue places. You know and everybody has their own little barbecue you know, like we've had some that said, I ate Bozo's or Top's. I like Top's; it's really—or the Rendezvous or Leonard's. I had a lot of people come in and say man I ate at Leonard's, and the silver dollars in the floor and stuff. A guy in my hometown, I said—I told him I had bought a barbecue restaurant in Memphis and he said were you—were you the one that had the silver dollars in the floor? And I said no; that was Leonard, so barbecue is a funny and weird thing that there's a lot of loyalty in the barbecue business. We had a guy come in, a chef come in last week from Birmingham that bought 12 bottles of my sauce. And I said wow; what do you do? He said, shrimp and grits and, he said, I use your sauce on top. And he said, it is fine and so I'm looking at trying that out and just seeing what that tastes like. He said, I tell everybody this is Gridley's barbecue sauce on top of that. So barbecue is—it's a weird thing.

[Laughs]

00:30:30

RF: And tell me about getting into the barbecue business from—you know, from the manufacturing job that you had before, was it difficult; did you ever question yourself? Did—did your wife question what you were going; what—?

00:30:44

DW: Oh yeah; yeah I believe that when God shuts the door he opens a window you know, and my faith is what got me through, you know, these trials and tribulations I had in—in the Delta, because when your business is failing and you're doing everything you can do and then something just happens that puts you in a whole other direction and that's—that's strange.

[Laughs] So you know she didn't like the idea of moving to Memphis. When I told her I said, we're going to move, she said well I'm not moving. And I just told her to pray about it. **[Laughs]** And we're here, so—.

00:31:24

RF: And running a restaurant those first weeks, was it—was it tough? How different was it?

00:31:29

DW: For probably the first six months it was terrible 'cause we had to get a—we had to get a point of sale. There's a lot of stuff—we redecorated the restaurant; we—you know we fine-tuned everything and like I say she's really the brains behind everything, you know. She's—she's a go-getter and she's the brains behind all this. I'm just kind of—I'm kind of a hang loose type guy. You know, I like—my thing is I like the customers and I like cooking; so—.

00:32:01

RF: Can you say a few words about your customer base—your clientele; who eats here?

00:32:07

DW: It's a broad line—rich, poor, black, white, Hispanic. It's—it crosses racial lines, you know financial lines; you know, it's—it's just shocking you know shocking. We had a guy that owns like six or seven manufacturing plants. He said I've ate at Gridley's since I was eight years-old. It's shocking, so—.

00:32:31

RF: Do you still love to eat barbecue after—after working and cooking for two years?

00:32:36

DW: I used to like eating it; I—I see so much of it, about once a month I'll eat me one now **[Laughs]** 'cause I guess I'm just back there working on it. It was the same when I—I worked at Sonic and I got where I just couldn't eat it. I just—I work around it so much, I want—I want a sub sandwich or something else. **[Laughs]** But there's some—there's some new stuff we're working on, some new products that we're trying out. We're you know—R&D you know we're just trying to test market and different things to add to the line and nothing will be taken away but we want to add more to the line.

00:33:10

RF: Can you talk about some of them?

00:33:12

DW: Well we—we tried fried okra here not too long ago and it went over real good. You know and we're trying—we're trying a couple more products that I hadn't even—that I can't talk about

right now but that I think is going to go over real good. Like I say, we don't want to talk about anymore until we actually bring them out. You know what—. [*Laughs*]

00:33:40

RF: All right; well just—just I guess one more question. Where do you think barbecue is going to go in Memphis? Do you think it's going to always be the most popular thing to eat in town?

00:33:49

DW: I think it will continue on. I think that we've got a legacy, you know. We've got a lot of big shoes to fill here in Memphis and there will be newcomers come on and there will be some old-comers that will leave you know and won't come back. You know there's some names that have left us you know and—and there's some that have come on. Just like the Interstate; it's fairly new—15 or 20 years and they've come on strong. They do a good job and they just do a really good job, so—.

00:34:19

RF: So the—the white tablecloths at that original Gridley's, there's no restaurant that does that anymore, and probably—I don't think there has been in Memphis for a long time. Do you think there can ever be a barbecue or maybe just not supposed to go together—barbecue and—and white tablecloths. Do you have any comment on that?

00:34:35

DW: Yeah; there's some plans for a big Gridley's here in Memphis that we're working on now and we don't know which direction—you might see this. You might see all this again here within the next year and a half or two years, so—.

00:34:52

RF: Excellent; well if you'd like to add anything else but I—I want to thank you and this—this was a good conversation.

00:34:58

DW: I'd just like to tell the listeners come up to Memphis and try our barbecue. And it's a lot of good barbecue places in Memphis and this is the Capital, and come up here and enjoy our barbecue in Memphis, Tennessee.

00:35:15

RF: All right; well thank you Mr. Walker for speaking for the Barbecue Trail.

00:35:20

DW: Thank you.

00:35:22

[End Doug Walker-Gridley's Interview]