

Jeneane Barber, Owner of Jeneane's Restaurants
Interview by Justin Griffis, Chinedu Egwu, and Maggie Cropp, April 14, 2013

Justin Griffis: So I guess we would want to start way back when you were first growing up, since we are not really familiar with that kind of time, and so where did you grow up?

Jeneane Barber: Here in Macon, born and raised.

Justin Griffis: What was your family environment like? Can you describe the South at the time?

Jeneane Barber: Well, we were not scared of a lot of stuff that we are today. In other words, we had no air conditioning; we used to put fans in the windows. I'm fifty-three. I'm old. Not really though, I feel that way sometimes. Well it was different; you didn't go out to eat.

Justin Griffis: Was it all home cooking?

Jeneane Barber: Everybody ate at home. There weren't any restaurants. There weren't convenient stores everywhere. If you wanted gas, you know, you would have to make a special...you did things...people were more conscientious of money. I think that was also after the era of the Depression. I mean my parents, they weren't well off. My dad worked at the railroad. My mom was a secretary. Back in them days, they made 300 dollars a week and that was top pay. My granddad, I remember seeing that his paychecks were like 17 dollars for a week. Now he worked in a cotton gin in West Point Georgia. I mean things have really changed.

Justin Griffis: So your mother worked as a secretary. Would she come home and cook after?

Jeneane Barber: Yes, she would.

Justin Griffis: Ok, so your mother did all the cooking in the house?

Jeneane Barber: Yes, she did. Actually, my dad helped too. They worked together. Well my dad worked swing shifts so he would work, you know, 3-7 then 7-11 and then 11-7. He would work swing shifts so he would help out too.

Justin Griffis: So was it an equal effort or did your mother lead the charge on cooking?

Jeneane Barber: Yes, actually it was. My dad was a good cook. Usually it wasn't like that. They were raised to do it that way. You know the husband did the yard work. Yeah, my dad really enjoyed cooking.

Justin Griffis: Was it typical, I guess at that time you were growing up, for women to have jobs? Or was it always the woman would be at home and the man would go out?

Jeneane Barber: Well, I don't know because my mom worked. The reason my mom worked was because her family was from Rome, Georgia, and she grew up needing to work because her dad had tuberculosis. He was a barber. At a time they lived in Waycross and then moved to Rome, Georgia because they had the tuberculosis clinic up there. So see how things kind of move around a little bit? The reason she had to work is because she was brought up with her mother

working and her dad not working so she brought in money also for the family. See, today's kids get jobs and they spend it on themselves and back in them days you got jobs so you could help support your family. It's weird; it's different than it is today.

Justin Griffis: When you were growing up, when both your parents were working, was that when you started cooking as well?

Jeneane Barber: It was one of our chores. Correct.

Justin Griffis: So is that when you, when you were a child or when you were a teenager, is that when you realized that you wanted to work with food? Or was it just something you had to do?

Jeneane Barber: No. I excelled in it. When I went to school...I automatically...it just fell upon me. I just fell in love with it. I liked the organization of it. I like everything coming together. I hated school, with a passion.

Justin Griffis: What school did you go to?

Jeneane Barber: Methodist School. I enjoyed working in the kitchen because I got out of going to church. But really it's not because I did not like going to church, it was just I didn't want to get dressed up and go to church. Even though I was raised church, I just didn't like going to church.

Justin Griffis: Yeah, cooking sounds much better to me than church too.

Jeneane Barber: Yeah, it was.

Justin Griffis: Do you think that you were mostly self-taught when it came to cooking? Or did anyone influence you?

Jeneane Barber: Yeah, mostly self-taught. A few people in this town gave me some inspiration because I used to work for Leo's. None of y'all are familiar with Leo's? Ok...it was a classic French food restaurant here in town. It had been there for years. Actually it was more Greek than French because the people who owned it were Greek, but they used French cuisine. You'll have to ask your fella about that, Leo's downtown. It was the place to go eat.

Justin Griffis: That seems interesting. I guess when I think of Macon...

Jeneane Barber: Yeah it was on the Alley. What's there now? Downtown grill, that's what it is now.

Justin Griffis: Is it owned by the same people?

Jeneane Barber: No no no no. Leo got into some drug trouble when he...(some mans name) was a probation guy here in town, what do you call them...bondsmen. Well he went up for bond then left. Scooped up back to Greece so they couldn't get him. This was probably 35 years ago ok.

Justin Griffis: Did you receive any specialized culinary training after college or school?

Jeneane Barber: No. I took any book I could find about food. And I have quite an assortment of cookbooks; I've always collected them.

Justin Griffis: When you were growing up and you were going to school, what was the typical role of women in the South? Would you describe it as being equal or would you describe it...

Jeneane Barber: They were homemakers. A few weren't, but back in the day it was cheaper for the mom to stay at home and keep the kids versus putting them in daycare. There was no such thing as daycare. There were certain places that had daycare but most kids stayed home with their mom or their grandparents. See where we are going with all of this? It's just different now than it was years ago.

Justin Griffis: So how did you get into the restaurant business when a typical role of a woman was to be a homemaker?

Jeneane Barber: Well, I wanted to make money. My dream was always, even when I was a kid, was to have my own restaurant. I think when I was younger, I did not continue going to school because of the fact that I made so much money being a waitress. Back in the day you made killer money in waitressing. It was just a fun thing to do. The fellowship of your coworkers, or people who worked at different restaurants, it was just fun. I mean, we had lots of fun back in them days.

Justin Griffis: So you quit school to be a waitress?

Jeneane Barber: Oh yes.

Justin Griffis: How did you go from there to being a...

Jeneane Barber: Still in the back of my mind I wanted my own restaurant. I opened a place...I've worked at several places here in this town...but I opened a place downtown where Between The Bread is now. It was a regional cutlass café. Are you familiar with that in your research? No? Ok, Between The Bread is located downtown on Mulberry Street, down the street from my other location. I paid my rent there. Mr. Emmett Barnes helped me really get started because...the thing was I was getting to a place where people were telling me, "we want to come eat with you but we knew you were going to be busy so we didn't." Well that used some business sense so what I decided to do was to buy another location. I bought that Annex building next to the American Federal building, which is my location downtown now.

Justin Griffis: Ok, so this is your first location?

Jeneane Barber: No this is the second. Actually it is the third location. The first location I just moved because I needed more space. So I bought that building and Emmett sold it to me even though he had a higher bid than what I could get a loan for, so I did that route. Then I hired my sister because they were in some trouble down living in Florida. But my sister works for me, she is downtown. She don't work for me, she just runs downtown. And then my nephew...it's just family oriented.

Justin Griffis: Ok so the business is family oriented? It's all family run?

Jeneane Barber: Mhm, she is downtown and I came out here. We came out here about 12 years ago.

Justin Griffis: So this is where you mainly focus your...

Jeneane Barber: Oh yeah I stay here.

Justin Griffis: Around what time did Jeneane's open?

Jeneane Barber: In '89.

Justin Griffis: What would you say the differences are between your two establishments?

Jeneane Barber: Well we serve lunch and supper out here. And downtown is breakfast and lunch. Business crowd downtown, you know Monday through Friday. We do a killer Sunday lunch out here. And like I said, we serve dinner out here. We have pretty good dinner business out here.

Justin Griffis: Would you describe, typically is the breakfast, lunch and dinner menu is typical southern food?

Jeneane Barber: Oh yeah, I will throw a few things in there that aren't southern food but, you know, it's all kind of related. I've tried throwing other stuff on the menu but they don't care for it.

Justin Griffis: Are all the recipes and everything based on your own experience and self- taught experiences?

Jeneane Barber: Yeah, the recipes are also from people telling me about their food. I'm real; I stay on them too about it, on the salt content in things. People really need to cut back on salt and sugar. I mean they just do; it's just too much. That's not what southern food is about anyhow because if you use too much salt or sugar in your foods, you don't taste what you're eating, it's covered up.

Justin Griffis: You like the flavor, the actual thing.

Jeneane Barber: Yeah. I don't like covering up nothing. It's got to balance flavors.

Justin Griffis: Would you say that's a main issue right now with southern foods?

Jeneane Barber: Yeah a lot of people over-season things. A lot of people use too much cooking meat. You know what I'm talking about when I say cooking meat? You know, neck bone, backbone, fatback, and all that good stuff.

Justin Griffis: Would you say that is the main difference that has changed in Southern food since you started?

Jeneane Barber: I've made it healthier. We don't use all that in there.

Justin Griffis: I guess when I think of southern food I don't think of it as healthy. What exactly have you done to make it healthy?

Jeneane Barber: We don't use lard. Back in the day everybody used lard. They used it because that is an item that they had on hand. It's not because it's what...it's what they used. They used it in their cornbread; they used it in their beans; they used it in the peas and beans; they used it in a lot of stuff. They didn't have margarine. Back in the day they didn't have margarine. They had butter. They had lard and butter. They made their butter and the lard came from what they slaughtered.

Justin Griffis: So what keeps you cooking after all these years?

Jeneane Barber: Bills. No it's not just that. My employees have been with me for quite a long time. If you're in business, you take on their responsibilities also. I think more people need to do that who are in charge and who start businesses or try and keep the economy going. I have 40 employees here. That's a lot. Some of them are part time. But some of them I have had working for me for a long time. Some of them put their kids in school and feed their families. It's a lot of responsibilities.

Justin Griffis: Do you think you get a strong sense of community having such an established local restaurant in Macon?

Jeneane Barber: Yes, they love that. Let me tell you why. For instance, a customer comes in here. His wife passed away. He comes in here because he stays at home; he is retired. He comes here to socialize. He has no one else to socialize with besides church or whatever else he decides to do. A lot of people come here and they will socialize. And it is part of the reason that they come here. They come here to eat but they also come here because they have a sense of socialization here. Does that make sense? A lot of people don't have that going on here. I mean because we are a local place but there will be three different guys sitting here and they will talk to each other because they are having dinner but yet they are not sitting with them. Men are more not willing to sit with each other. Women will go sit with each other. They will.

Justin Griffis: Now, being a business owner, being established, being successful, do you think you have a lot more ease and get a lot more respect as a woman in 2013 than you did when you first started?

Jeneane Barber: Oh yeah. Let me tell you when I first started, I could not get a bank to loan me no money. Let me tell you I was not real happy at that. I had been in the business but I had been a waitress so I did not report on my income so my W2's only said I had a certain amount of money, which I did that to myself by not being honest. I did not make enough money so I had to borrow from people who knew I could do it. I painted houses. I was so driven and knew that I could do this. It was rough not knowing what you are going to do. But I was bound and determined I wasn't going to fail. Back in them days I didn't have a laundry service. I had to get some of my own stuff so I wouldn't have to pay to have someone bring it to me. If I could find places to cut money, I would. It was different. I didn't have four other employees.

Justin Griffis: So you kind of listed the socialization aspect, you said you aimed to have healthier southern food, what has made your business so successful?

Jeneane Barber: We are quick. A family comes in here, say they got to take their kid to baseball, they come in here and eat before the game. They don't feel like they have overeaten; they have been fed in 20 minutes. That's ordering, eating, and out of here. And it's good.

Justin Griffis: What is your favorite thing to cook here? Or what is your favorite item on the menu?

Jeneane Barber: I guess my chicken potpie for today. I just like to prepare that. It's a different little thing. I use swiss cheese and American instead of sharp cheddar. It's just different. And I don't use a puff pastry; I use a cobbler crust. Our noodle salad is real good. It's kind of an off-take on macaroni salad, but I call it noodle salad because I make it with noodles. It's not quite as starchy if you use them.

Justin Griffis: Do you think your best items are the ones that are typically southern or the ones with variation like your noodle salad?

Jeneane Barber: Variation. Turnip greens don't really appeal to our clientele. We have an older clientele. We also have a younger clientele here but they were not raised on any turnip greens, but some of these people were. We sell a lot of turnip greens.

Justin Griffis: So you have to appeal to the entire audience?

Jeneane Barber: Yeah I try to. Y'all's group comes in here on Sunday morning and eats my turnip greens because they are hung-over.

Justin Griffis: Tell us what you think about modern southern culture. Are there any traditions or ideologies that you think are dying or should die?

Jeneane Barber: Well, you know, back when 9/11 hit, everybody was searching for the comfort food. Then we had the economy go sour and everybody wanted to go to comfort food. They are blaming the industry on gaining weight, but it's not the industries fault. It's people doing it to themselves. You can choose to eat the right stuff. You can choose to eat the right amount of stuff. Don't go back for seconds you know. Even though we sell desserts here, you don't always need one. Treat yourself every once in a while and don't do it all the time. It is a treat if you do it sometimes.

Justin Griffis: Do you have any ideas who are home cooking in the South, like how to, you know, have that nostalgia and reminisce of southern food and how to keep it healthy?

Jeneane Barber: A lot of people don't do the southern cooking because of the prep. When I say prep work, I'm talking about you having to clean the vegetables. And some of them take a long time to cook. I mean, you can still flash cook collard greens but they don't have that taste to them. They have got a different texture to them which is ok, but it's not what I'm used to. They are edible but to me they are not as good as they should be. And the mustard greens which are

tender greens or turnip greens are tender but collard greens you can't do that to. They are tough. Rutabaga, stuff like that. Wait what was the question again?

Justin Griffis: I think people often times want to have that southern food and you have that mentality that this is the South and we have to eat our fried chicken and cornbread. Is there anything people can do to change that while still having that same Southern pride when they eat their food?

Jeneane Barber: Well, there again if you don't eat it all the time, it ain't bad for you. People are not cooking fried chicken in lard. Back in the day they did use lard and some places still use it. You can't beat the way it tastes man but it isn't good for you. I mean it is just hard on your arteries. It's a heart attack waiting to happen. There are ways to change things. I changed to unsweet tea versus sweet tea. First I went to half and half but now I'm all unsweet. I can do it.

Chinedu Egwu: Do you, when you go home, what do you do? Are you tired of cooking because you stay here all day or do you like...?

Jeneane Barber: I had back surgery back in March so I usually don't work. I do a couple of nights. For instance, I fixed lasagna last night. Enough to keep me fed for a couple of days. But I love to cook. I mean my friends, when we all get together, we don't go out to eat as much as we used to because of DUIs. I'm not saying we got them, but it's just safer not to. I can't get a DUI. My picture be on the front page, I'd be dead for shit. I just don't want to get a DUI; I don't want my insurance to go up. If I want to drink, I will just stay home. I don't over drink, but if I had three glasses of wine, I don't want to get a DUI from that. And I can drive with three glasses of wine, but yet it's going to register that I am drunk. I don't want to pay a lawyer to fix me on that.

Justin Griffis: I'm a senior, so I've been in Macon for four years, and I've noticed that there is a big racial divide, politically and socially. And what I've noticed going into different southern restaurants is that southern food, especially in Macon, is the one thing that connects both cultures. Do you think that there is any truth to that?

Jeneane Barber: Yes and no. I was raised eating Southern food. Our culture goes way back. My grandparents worked in the fields too. It's not as much of a culture thing as people think. I mean you ate what you could afford to eat. The Southern cuisine is exactly what people would eat because it's what they could afford to do. Black-eyed peas are cheap man, 27 cents a bag. Some people would just eat peas and beans for supper. I remember growing up, we didn't even have a meat sometimes. We would eat vegetables grown out of the garden. That's what you did. You went to the farmers market and picked out bushels of peas and greens because you couldn't find the stuff in the freezer section like you can now. So if you wanted to eat it... people would put up stuff, peas and corn and peaches because we lived here in the South...the answer to your question is the difference...I don't know, it's not as bad as people think. Maybe in some towns but I don't see it here in Macon as people thought it was. This town, I thought everyone got along in this town, even growing up.

Justin Griffis: I think I noticed more like there are political issues racially that I've noticed.

Jeneane Barber: I think that has a lot to do with money versus the differences in the races or whatever. This town is...I love this town. I was born and raised here but it is run ass backwards

sometimes, and it's sad. But then you've got people who don't...they get the power behind them and they take advantage of it. There again though it isn't a racial thing. It's just people. I mean I pay a shit wad of property taxes. I mean I do. It's ridiculous for what I have to pay in property taxes. And I don't mind it but it makes me mad when they hire some guy who they should have researched first. I research before I hire a dishwasher. What the hell. They were told not to hire him but they pay that man 350,000 dollars. It don't make no sense. And from what I understand, he hired people he didn't need to hire. Don't even get me started talking on some of this. And it's just not a racial thing. It's a common sense thing. I get mad about politics in this town.

Justin Griffis: Would you say that the reason things are like...you think that food is one of the things that like makes sure Macon has a very fluid community? I know going to southern restaurants is the only times I see such equal integration.

Jeneane Barber: Really?

Justin Griffis: Well I mean I also go to Mercer which, to be honest, isn't the most diverse.

Jeneane Barber: Well it's a private school. A very expensive private school. My nephew is going there.

Justin Griffis: Who is your nephew?

Jeneane Barber: Justin. Actually he doesn't start until next quarter I think it is. But he is going to be pre-law. And why y'all needed a football team I don't know. It ain't about sports when you are going to school. It's about learning and learning what you want to do in life. I read an article in some magazine...I forget what college it was...but they didn't even realize that there was a 1,700 dollar fee that they were paying every year was going to sports oriented activities. Some of these kids don't have 1,700 dollars to pay. It's just sad. I know it is great fun. I know I had fun going to some football games when I was in high school but good Lord. It is a good thing but I don't know man. You've got young people today thinking that that's what they are going to do. They need to be learning a trade.

Justin Griffis: I don't think much of our money goes to the football team. I think the reason they had to get a team is because the board of trustees said they would only give money to a football team rather than to more education, which is unfortunate.

Jeneane Barber: You see it's all about money. The football team is all because of partying. It's what it comes down to. You ever been to a Georgia game? It's good to be hyped up about something but good Lord; it doesn't make no sense man. You can only drink so much. It's like southern food. It's a social event. Churches used to have a Sunday supper or a Sunday dinner. They would eat between the trees of the churches and everybody would bring a home cooked meal or a covered dish. It's fun; people would bring a whole lot of different stuff. People used to get together for different reasons. That was a social thing.

Chinedu Egwu: What other Southern traditions did you experience?

Jeneane Barber: Well...I like being nice to people; that's a southern thing. And not being rude. I'm not saying people from the North are rude but down here...we are kind of friendly down here. Basic knowledge.

Maggie Cropp: I can't say the same about California. That's where I'm from.

Jeneane Barber: Really? It's because no one can trust anybody out there. The sun here...it gets hot here. But if you've lived here, it doesn't bother you. It don't bother me too much. I was working outside in the yard...I like the South.

Justin Griffis: Do you think the traditions what makes the South have an identity?

Jeneane Barber: Yeah. Church, family, and this group down here is big on social activities. People are so into their lives that they don't have time to do the things that they used to do. We used to sit on our porches and you don't do that no more.

Justin Griffis: Do you think that is a travesty? Do you think it's a problem with our generation like how we are so individual...?

Jeneane Barber: Y'all texting... I mean look at my phone.

Justin Griffis: I don't think I could survive.

Jeneane Barber: You should try. I mean its ridiculous going down the road; everybody is on their phone. A lady the other day made me so mad in here I wanted to slap the phone out of her hand. She did this to me (holds up pointer finger to mouth).

Justin Griffis: They have some signs in some restaurants that if you are on your phone you won't be served.

Jeneane Barber: I mean it's rude. I'm sorry my nephew...he would just not shut up. He is trying to buy a house and needs my input on some of this. But I should have stopped on my phone but I couldn't. He was on a roll. I should have just stayed in the truck but that also would have been rude. But I can never get him to talk to me about stuff so I needed him to finish that conversation. Southern cuisine is a good thing. It's not as unhealthy as people think. I mean it is our roots down here because Southern roots came from what people grew around here. All of this area, not just here. The Carolinas...the Carolinas are big on Southern food. They are almost more than Georgia was I think because they are on the coast. They had more of a...they had rice there. We didn't have rice here until it got brought over here. Some of the old cookbooks are kind of interesting. And why people were able to get oysters back in those days... I mean I see bunches of recipes for oysters. You can't even get fresh fish here now. Because my mom lives down...she's retired and she lives in Florida by Pensacola and she said the fish down there is excellent and I can't compare it to the fish here because if I buy it, it's nowhere near as good. And most people it wouldn't bother but I know the difference. I'm a foodie.

Maggie Cropp: Do you make everything on your menu from scratch?

Jeneane Barber: We do. The only can I use are canned tomato products. Or frozen. Some things have to be frozen now. Field peas and snaps or English peas this time of year...that has to be frozen. But it's not a prepared item. But I have to research items or produce I can buy. Now I've got a produce guy that comes to me four times a week. He sells me fresh corn and all that good stuff. Bell peppers, onions, all that. I do not buy what I call bagged lettuce. It has got too many cleaning products in it to be putting it in my body. Even at the grocery store, I won't buy it. They put too many gasses in those bags and it has to affect that product. Taste the difference. Do y'all ever buy... none of y'all cook right now do you?

Justin Griffis: I cook. Sometimes, I'm trying to learn.

Jeneane Barber: When you buy bag lettuce...are you familiar with bag lettuce? Used for the convenience and the express of it...don't buy it. Buy the stuff that is loose. You have to wash it now because other people have been touching it and taste the difference of that bagged lettuce and the other lettuce. You never buy that bagged stuff. Yet they sell a bunch of it; I don't understand people.

Justin Griffis: People are lazy.

Jeneane Barber: Exactly. People are looking for shortcuts. Everybody is finding shortcuts. That's what's wrong with this world. You shouldn't take shortcuts. Sometimes long, slow and simmer. Just like we had to pick the chicken for the chicken and dumplings. I could buy boxed chicken all day long, frozen chickens, to go in my chicken and dumplings but I don't want to. You may find a bone, someone might cuss me out for a bone being in their food but I'm not going to tell that man that I am sorry. And we have had trouble before with finding a worm in a collard green but we use fresh collard greens. You know, you going to find that in there sometimes. It's not a...it ain't going to kill you.

Justin Griffis: People have gotten too picky. I know I have started cooking for myself the past few months and I have barely gone out, and I feel different. I feel completely different getting fresh food all the time.

Jeneane Barber: Oh yeah you can go out to eat all the time but you got to eat the right things. Know what to order.

Justin Griffis: It's not bad having sweet tea every now and then but as long as you aren't drinking it everyday...

Jeneane Barber: And sodas. People are drinking too many sodas. People are having gallbladder problems and kidney problems because they get stuck on this soft drinks. And I know some people who drink too many diet drinks. It's like they are addicted to them. It's an advertisement thing. It's all about the money.

Justin Griffis: What do you envision for when my generation is your age? How do you think food is going to be in the South? Do you think it will be the same?

Jeneane Barber: No. They are more health conscience. People started getting more health conscience, I say, when the AIDS epidemic came out in what, 74...76...somewhere in that era.

People started to be more healthier. Because they knew something could happen to them. Not just the gay people but people in general started to be healthier. People didn't want to get a heart attack so they just started being healthier. Y'all's generation is going to eat better I think. If they are not lazy. Because people are so health conscience now that... there was a survey on school kids and how they are not smoking. Not like they were ten years ago. Now y'all's friends smoke?

Justin Griffis: Well most people, when they start smoking, it's at college not in high school. And it's because of stress and they typically quit a year after college.

Jeneane Barber. Well good. That's a habit I wish I could break. I've never been able to break it. I smoke and I shouldn't.

Justin Griffis: I've got a lot of friends that are chain smokers. It's expensive too.

Jeneane Barber: And they dip. That's going on more so because you can do that all the time now. I mean the sign says no smoking but you don't see no signs that say no dip.

Justin Griffis: Have you seen those new electronic cigarettes that they try to help you quit?

Jeneane Barber: Oh I've tried those. It was nasty. I had to...I bite my cigarettes. Don't ask me why, it's a habit I had a long time ago so when I got these little things in my mouth, I would bite it and it would pop that little thing in there and I would get all this tobacco nicotine juice in my mouth and it was gross. They are not good. It did not work for me.

Maggie Cropp: I looked on your website and saw that you have different menus everyday. Why?

Jeneane Barber: To keep it interesting. I can say this and brag about it. I have people who eat with me five days a week. Six some of them. But they know they can come here and eat. At \$7.50 ...you can't go to McDonalds or Burger King and eat for \$7.50. I mean it's reasonable but yet they know we don't overfeed them. They know that they are eating healthy. If you can come here and eat... I mean if you can come treat yourself to a baked sweet potato, as long as you don't put all that sugar on it...it's one of the best things you can put in your mouth...or your body I should say. Buttered carrots, that's exactly what they are. Fresh cut carrots we cut up back there washed, peeled, cut up....then we cook them in butter and a little bit of honey. And a touch of salt. And then there macaroni and cheese because you can't go without that. Broccoli casserole...that's a starch but you know...cream style corn...I use cornstarch and corn and cream. I like cream style corn because it makes it creamier than butter, which is good for you, but I like the cream in there. Harvard beets, there again beets are excellent for you. They are full of...they make sugar out of beets. It's a natural sugar. Beets are good for you. Butter beans...that's a starch but the people down in the South were raised on butter beans. I like mixing them with my field peas. Have you heard of dried lima beans? They were developed for storage purposes. Black-eyed peas are good; you can eat them fresh all day long when they are coming out of the field but they don't hold. Their shelf life on that is like nothing. So when they get to the shelf they have to be either dried or cooked. Or frozen. So they dry them for holding purposes.

Justin Griffis: Do you think there are any other restaurants in Macon that kind of push the envelope on Southern food that are really exceptional?

Jeneane Barber: I don't really go out to eat anywhere else too much. I heard Bears Den is ok but I heard their food was salty. I've had lots of customers tell me that. I mean, you don't need all that. We do a barbeque chicken here but I use a tomato base and I don't put too much sauce in there. And I use just a little bit of brown sugar in it, which has got molasses in it. But I use that kind of sugar in it so it doesn't taste like barbeque, it tastes more like chicken. And I use the reduction of chicken stock. But these recipes are because of what I came up with. My taste buds. People insure their hands who are hand models...you know my tongue is worth a lot of money because my taste buds are excellent. I could tell you exactly what is in something sometimes. I know flavors because I've tasted all of them. I've always been excited about food so I've always wanted to know what curry tastes like, I wanted to know what the cayenne pepper tastes like versus, you know, red pepper flakes...the different heats. And putting things together flavor wise. Salads for instance, we have carrot salad, apple salad, pear salad, potato salad, noodle salad, cole slaw and sliced tomatoes. I know that's a lot of salads but we have people who come here who just want salads to eat. Which is good because they are getting salads, which is raw salads, which are better for you and the vegetables, which are better for you...and the fruits.

Justin Griffis: Are those just tossed salads or is this with the sauce and the...?

Jeneane Barber: Are you ready? It's like carrot, pineapple juice and raisins. And a little bit of mayo. Because we cook the carrots through twice so you get carrot juice so you don't have to use all that mayo in it. And you taste the carrot. For instance, Chick-a-fila's carrot salad is way too sweet. Have y'all ever had any carrot salad?

Justin Griffis: I have had Chick-a-fila's carrot salad. It tastes like cole slaw.

Jeneane Barber: Are you a picky eater?

Maggie Cropp: No, I...I've lived in the South now for like 8 months and I've never eaten Southern food. I grew up in Wisconsin so I had like casseroles and everything but not any of this crazy stuff like...the first day in class we were talking about like collard greens and I was like I don't even know what that is.

Jeneane Barber: Well, swiss chard. Are you familiar with that? It's a Northern thing. See swiss chard is a cold winter vegetable so it grew better up in the North than here even though we've got it here now. You know, you can go to Lowes and buy some and grow it but that was the difference in the Southern thing versus some of the other things. We had hardier greens down here because they grew down here. There's nothing better than getting a collard green that has been...had the frost hit it. They used to call it the first frost. It would tenderize the first green and they would be better.

Justin Griffis: Is it still grown like that?

Jeneane Barber: Oh yeah yeah yeah.

Justin Griffis: I've never actually looked at how vegetables were grown or anything.

Jeneane Barber: Oh really? Aw man my hands are still probably dirty from the stuff I've been doing...I was pulling weeds today. But you have to...if you grow a garden you have to maintain a garden. It's not going to grow instantly.

Justin Griffis: Do you grow a garden for the food here or...?

Jeneane Barber: No. Actually, that is my hobby now.

Justin Griffis: Do you ever use your vegetables that you grow for like home cooking?

Jeneane Barber: Oh yeah at home. But not here. I don't have the volume. Now I can go down to Cordele. It's going down towards Florida. It is a huge part of Georgia that grows vegetables. Huge. They are called the watermelon capital. If you are all really interested in food culture, you should really go to that place probably in the end of June. They've got buses they've taken and chopped them off...that's where they put the watermelons from the field. Because the only way to harvest these things is from manually picking them. They don't have a machine...maybe y'all's generation can figure out how to harvest things better.

Justin Griffis: I think in some places, things just grow in warehouses now. They have computers that...

Jeneane Barber: Yeah they do, which is good because of several things. They can call it organic because they don't have to use any bug spray on the stuff...

Maggie Cropp: Are you always coming up with new salads and different ways to cook things?

Jeneane Barber: I used to when I was more inspired. I've had back trouble here for a few years and when you have pain all the time it kind of sucks on things. Your creativity goes away. Here lately I've been feeling better so I'm thinking I'm going to get back into the swing of things. But my main thing is I want to offer to the costumers but they ain't too good on change. They came here for this, so that's what they want. We've had problems getting certain items in sometimes and lets say for instance I couldn't get fresh corn on the cob in January but good Lord hardly no one could get fresh corn...well they get upset. That's why a lot of things have changed; they are seasonal. We used to pin those seasons. You could only get only certain items at certain times a year. Tomatoes for instance...it's really interesting in growing...it's got a lot to do with the farmers, southern food does. Because it's like... first it's summer or spring...in the winter you get tomatoes from Florida. It then creeps up and you can get them from central Florida. You are able to get a fresher product if you follow the season. Cabbage for instance, cabbage grown in the Carolinas is excellent. I think it is because of the dirt up there and the moisture they have. They don't have black-eyed peas up there. They do a traditional or regional thing that's called a yellow-eyed pea. It's more of a starchier pea but they are beautiful. Food is beautiful if people think about it instead of it just being to eat.

Justin Griffis: Yeah I have been watching a lot of Food Channel recently.

Jeneane Barber: I love the Food Channel. I don't like any of those reality shows though. I think a lot of it is staged. And I've worked in kitchens where it's just so stressful and you have to have a drink after words. I hated working in that way. And we get stressed here too but I try to make it

fun back there. Since I did work at other places and have to deal with certain things, working with people I didn't enjoy working with...now I just fire them. But it is stressful in the food business because you are on a time schedule. And you are definitely on a time schedule; we have to be ready by 10:30 everyday. But we get here early in the morning. I get to work at 4:30 every morning. Because we do not open cans and we do it by volume here. Even though my prices are not that high, volume is what we rely on to make ends meet. I'd rather make a dollar off everybody instead of 4. But there again, it keeps things rotating.

Justin Griffis: Do you think that having a kind of system help you with the slow preparation as well? And make this place unique?

Jeneane Barber: Yeah I do. Because there are so many things out there now...I mean you can buy chicken already grilled or frozen or grilled and a lot of people do that. But what they are thinking is just the bottom line. And the bottom line is that they don't have no prep-work in it, they don't have payroll in it and they don't have no storage in it. You have got to have determination. Any kind of business...you just don't give up. So many people give up. And sometimes you should walk away, for instance, Northside. You know my place over there on Northside, anyone want to buy a building? I closed the doors over there. I was angry but I had a manager over here...people who work for you, you let them know their part in your business. You can't let them think they are above you or that you can't do without them. I have never thought that anywhere I have ever worked that they can't do without me. The mentality of that just really ticks me off. Back in the day people would take pride in their jobs. Not all the time I guess but it was more so people took pride in their job. The United States used to say Made In America. Well you don't see that as much anymore do you? I mean I drive a Ford pickup truck... I buy New Balance tennis shoes. But I'm happy for these companies leaving them in the states rather than just going somewhere else. And more people need to do that.