ARTHUR BROCATO
Angelo Brocato's Ice Cream & Confectionary – New Orleans, LA
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Interviewer: Sara Roahen

Southern Foodways Alliance
Project: New Orleans Eats/Guardians of Tradition

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Saturday, February 17th. I'm in New Orleans, Louisiana at Angelo Brocato's Ice-Cream Shop. **[*Laughs*]** Could you tell me your name and what you do for a living?

00:00:21

Arthur Brocato: I'm Arthur Brocato and I'm the owner and operator of Angelo Brocato's Ice-Cream and Confectionary in New Orleans and have been doing this basically all my life.

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SR: And I would add not only the owner but you make--?

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AB: I'm the--the--right **[*Laughs*]** owner, operator--

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SR: Baker?

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AB: --baker, ice-cream maker, customer service you name it.

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SR: And for the record the noises in the background are the--it's the ice-cream shop is getting ready to open at 10:00 in the morning. So why don't we begin; can you start with telling--telling me when the shop opened and where it was then and who opened it?

00:01:08

AB: Well the shop was opened in 1905 in the French Quarter by my grandfather, Angelo Brocato, Sr. The--he--my grandfather was born in Sicily in a town called Cefalù about 90 miles from Palermo and he learned the trade as an apprentice from 12 years old. They were--his father and mother and brothers and sisters were here in America probably in the late 1870s when my grandfather's dad passed away with the yellow fever epidemic and his mother returned to--having no family here returned to--to Sicily with her children, you know, where there was more family close by and they returned to Palermo. They lived in Palermo and that's where at the age of 12 my grandfather worked in several of the pastry and gelaterias and restaurants in Palermo.

00:02:29

SR: Did he live here and then go back or was he born there?

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AB: No; he--he was born in Cefalù, as was his brothers and sisters and parents and his father came here to--to New Orleans with the family in the 1800s. And my grandfather was only three years-old when his father--his father died in the yellow fever epidemic and they went back to Sicily then.

00:02:55

SR: And so 12 years old--?

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AB: Right. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: So did he go to school?

00:03:01

AB: Some schooling--not much, no, not a lot of formal schooling. Things were you know pretty rough in Sicily financially and so the children in the family had to work, you know to help support everyone. So he and one of his brothers went to work in the--in the pastry places and the other brother--well his oldest brother Salvatore was a shoemaker, just as his father was, and so they, you know, they managed that way and he--he worked in the pastry places and became a master of the trade over time and joined the Italian navy at 18 years old. In Italy, everyone there--all the males--had to perform their duty to the country so--. When he came out of the navy he came to Louisiana and worked in the sugarcane plantations in Donaldsonville cutting cane to try to make enough money to--he was already married--to bring his family here and to open up his own shop. And that he did and he--he opened in--in New Orleans in the French Quarter. His first shop was on--actually it was on Decatur Street right off of Ursulines, and that area of the French Quarter--from say St. Ann to Esplanade, from the French Market to Rampart--was the, basically the Italian neighborhood in the turn of the century. And so he opened there and--selling ice-

cream in the summer months making--the first ice-cream he made was a torroncino, which is a cinnamon and almond ice-cream.

00:05:09

SR: Uh-huh; which you make?

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AB: Which we--that's right, which we still make and we serve it the same way in a rectangular block sliced. There were no such things as cones then.

00:05:20

SR: Oh really?

00:05:21

AB: Or dipped ice-cream. Everything was--was in slices and then he did vanilla and chocolate and the combination of vanilla and chocolate and did--he introduced the spumoni, which was a little too sophisticated for its time.

00:05:42

SR: Really?

00:05:44

AB: When he first opened it--so he stopped making it for a while; the spumoni and the cassata, and then he did the lemon ice and that was served--that wasn't served in a slice like the--like the torroncino and spumoni or vanilla and chocolate; it was served in a glass—soft, right from the machine and went into the glass and served with a spoon. The Italian people in the neighborhood would use that as their breakfast.

00:06:15

SR: The lemon ice?

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AB: The lemon ice right; they would come in with their warm Italian bread and they--they would dip the bread in the lemon ice and that was the breakfast.

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SR: Do you do that?

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AB: I've done it before but it's been a while. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: Because--

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AB: It's a little too acidic for me in the morning.

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SR: Yeah, it's intense. I wonder if they would have coffee with that.

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AB: I don't know. **[*Laughs*]**

00:06:38

SR: So also, for the record, you make lemon ice--

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AB: Yeah.

00:06:42

SR: --which is--I mean everybody knows that here in New Orleans.

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AB: Lemon ice, and we still, you know, use our fresh fruit you know being close--right near the French Market. He would go to the Market and get the fresh fruit that he would need--fresh strawberries were in season, peaches, you name it--whatever was in season he would make ice with that. It was very cooling in the hot summers in New Orleans--hot and humid summers, no air-conditioning, so that was--that was really a key item.

00:07:18

SR: Can you tell me--describe what three things that you've mentioned, the--the torroncino, the spumoni, and the cassata?

00:07:25

AB: Well the torroncino is a vanilla based ice-cream with cinnamon--ground cinnamon and almonds. The spumoni is a three-flavored ice-cream layered and made in a mold, and it has pistachio, tutti-frutti, lemon, and it has a special whipped cream center and it's sliced into a--a wedge. The cassata is the same as the spumoni but it has a layer of fruit and cake in it. And you know cassata was very elegant and used a lot for people who had special occasions, if they have a baptism or bridal--wedding shower or something like that or whatever; so--. Dinner before the wedding or after the wedding they would use the cassata.

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SR: Do they still--do people still use it that way or--?

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AB: No, that has changed over the years. We--unfortunately we've lost a lot of the traditions for some things like that. Some things have held on; others have changed.

00:08:38

SR: Yeah. And so your grandfather--how long did--did the shop stay in the French Quarter?

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AB: Well the shop was in the French Quarter until 1981. We--he--he started off in the one store in Decatur around the corner from Ursulines and then moved a few doors down on Ursulines. He was there a short time and then he moved to around two doors down on--on Ursulines right off of Decatur in the 500-block of Ursulines. And then he moved two doors down again **[*Laughs*]** where he--he was there until 1921--'21--'22 when he bought his own building in the 600-block of Ursulines which most people remember today--615-617 Ursulines, and it was that store that he tiled and recreated the--one of the I guess most fashionable places in New Orleans for having ice-cream, trying to model it after some of the places in Palermo. He had the white tile--ceramic tiled--floor and walls all the way to the ceiling; the craft-tech ceilings and the cornices, which were all decorative--archways--tiled archways. So it was a very elegant place--the ceiling fans; big parlor, two sides; had 20 tables at--at its peak.

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SR: It was big huh?

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AB: It was pretty big.

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SR: What happened to that building?

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AB: Well the--as--as things changed over the years the neighborhood changed. Being in an Italian neighborhood, people would come you know from all over and then they'd come sit down with ice-cream and--and then in the--when the automobile became more popular we even had car service.

00:10:54

SR: Really?

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AB: Very few people know about that, but they had car hops where cars would park on Ursulines all the way around the corner to Chartres Street and you had the neighborhood, you know, teenagers--girls and boys that would work for my grandfather and they would wait the tables and also wait on the cars, something like the old Morning Call and Café Du Monde had the trays, or Hopper's--places like that--had the trays you hook on the--on the car and go out and take their order and go fill the order and bring--bring stuff to the car and people would eat in their car and then they would go. And this went on for a number of years and--

00:11:38

SR: Was that ever when you were alive?

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AB: No, it ended--yeah it ended in the '40s around the time of World War II. Actually my mother and two of my aunts were car hops. **[*Laughs*]**

00:11:52

SR: Really.

00:11:53

AB: They lived in the neighborhood and they were car hops or waitresses in the store and it went on for quite a number of years. First of all, you know, we had a few--few ladies that still come around every now and then and of course most of them are in their 90s now or deceased that worked as car hops, and unfortunately that's one thing I've looked for and no one has ever had a picture of that.

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SR: That's what I was going to ask, yeah.

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AB: But it's something that--that existed for a period of time. But the--

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SR: Well was your mother--was your mother a Brocato by then, or was she--?

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AB: No, no; she was only about 13--14 years-old.

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SR: Was she from an Italian family also?

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AB: Yeah, yeah.

00:12:41

SR: What was her maiden name?

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AB: LoCicero. And they lived in the neighborhood. They lived on St. Philip and Dauphine and my--my Grandma Annie and my grandfather had a grocery--actually my grandmother ran the grocery store and my grandfather worked on the river as a--on the banana wharf. But the--the store stayed open until 1981. The neighborhood began to change after World War II with--the city started to expand toward the lake. People started to move out of the French Quarter--families started to move out--the Italian families started moving out of the French Quarter and they would come back to the French Quarter to get their desserts for the holidays and go to the Morning Call. But as the cars became more popular parking became more of a problem; people's patterns changed so they stayed and became more suburban, and then you had the change of the--the church around the corner, where the old Ursuline Convent is was at one time St. Mary's Italian Church. They had a community center and people would you know--anyone of Italian descent

got married there, baptized there, confirmed, went to school at St. Mary's Italian School. Well the school was closed in the early '60s, and so as people moved out they didn't return except for special occasions and by the time--it was in the '70s the church was closed and that just dispersed the Italian population from that gathering place. And so with the--with the people moving out, they wouldn't come back down to the French Quarter for those--those particular things. It was too much of a hassle and they would get a parking ticket or get their car towed away. **[*Laughs*]** So we had to make a decision; the family decided to sell the building in the late '60s; or my grandmother sold it actually before she died and we remained there for quite a number of years, but in order to expand it wasn't a possibility of expanding in that building. It wasn't--it wasn't that building; it was good for a retail store that existed at the time, but that's all. But as--as the population moved out we had to try to reach farther out in order to remain in business without having--having to establish another retail store someplace else and then have two or three stores. It would have been very difficult to manage; it's a family business. So we purchased the building on Carrollton in 1978 and renovated it; it was more accessible; we had more space to--.

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SR: This building here that we're in?

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AB: Yes.

00:15:49

SR: Okay.

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AB: To produce products and distribute them and we--the--the building was sold again on Ursulines Street to a gentleman who owns Croissant D'Or, Maurice Delechelle. He has a place on Chartres Street and eventually he was going to want the building in order to move his--his bakery in because he had to leave the store location he was in. He was on Chartres Street. So we opened here on Carrollton. We remained open there for two years, and then we closed the store over there and the business had waned quite a bit at the time because people were coming here--more convenient. So all in all it was--

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SR: And that--

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AB: --looking back it was the best possible move we could have made.

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SR: Because you can park here and--?

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AB: And it's just easier. It's congested around here now, but there are more businesses but--but it's--it's easier to get to, more convenient; it's just a whole different atmosphere.

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SR: At what point--I mean I'm assuming that for a while during your childhood did parts of your family still live in the Quarter or was that--?

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AB: Yeah. Actually we--I--I grew up and was born in the Quarter and grew up in the Quarter, and I remained there until I was 19 years-old. And we--we lived always a block and a half from the store; we lived on Dauphine Street between St. Philip and Ursulines. I went to St. Louis Cathedral School--my brothers and sisters and I; it was--the Quarter at the time was--there were children in the Quarter. **[*Laughs*]**

00:17:34

SR: Yeah.

00:17:34

AB: So, you know, people don't realize that but--you look at it today, but there were children and there were families. You went down the street, you knew almost everybody in their house. When I grew up it was the last--the tail-end of that; it was still a few families left and--but the Quarter was in the changing mode--more professional people moving in, a lot of apartments, and things like that but you know there were--there were the shopkeepers there when we were kids, all the little shops, the grocery stores; we had hardware stores, clothing stores--anything you wanted you could get in the French Quarter.

00:18:21

SR: It sounds so fun.

00:18:21

AB: Drugstores, and you didn't need a car and most of our life we didn't own a car. We walked from the house to the shop or to Canal Street to do shopping, or caught the bus or the streetcar. It was a very unique place and, you know, we had--it was a tight knit neighborhood so you knew everyone; people were coming in that we grew up with and you know--people will say to you--you grew up in the French Quarter? And it's like I'm an alien. **[*Laughs*]** You know, but it--it was a different experience but it was like an old New Orleans neighborhood and people in the suburbs just cannot connect to that.

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SR: Well it's kind of amazing how much it changed in just one generation.

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AB: Yes, it changed drastically. The turning point was after World War II. My understanding is that's when things started to change rapidly, and you know, it was a building boom in the city. The--you know, people opened up places in Gentilly started to open up, Lakeview, down Canal Boulevard toward the lakefront--all those areas started to develop--new construction. People wanted a new house. Before you lived--when you lived in the French Quarter, you lived here, your--your aunt lived in the next block and your grandmother lived around the corner, your

cousins lived here. Everyone was in the same vicinity, the whole family--within a two or three-block radius. Those types of neighborhoods don't exist anymore, unfortunately.

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SR: Right; especially since Katrina.

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AB: Right, and that's just--that's thrown everything out to the water, so to speak.

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SR: So how--how--what--so until what year Angelo Brocato live?

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AB: Oh my grand--?

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SR: The one who started--founded the--?

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AB: My grandfather passed away in 1946 and was 71 years-old. He worked in his business until basically he died. There was no such thing as retirement. He--he loved the business; he was a very hard-working man. He--he started making ice-cream before--without a hand crank. He would turn the barrel of the freezer by hand and the ice-cream was made with ice and salt, and

scraped the sides of the freezer with a big knife to make the ice-cream. And then gradually as things progressed and he got a hand-crank, they had the electric motor with belts and the machines with belts, and then the regular motors and ice-cream was made with ice and salt; there was no refrigeration at the time. Everything was made in metal molds and put in the ice and salt to harden, and then--it was a whole different process in--in the--. He made ice-cream in the summer months and in the winter months he make cannoli and cookies, and you didn't make cannolis in the summer. Easter Sunday was the magical day; Easter Sunday was the last--the only day you had both ice-cream and you had cannolis. That was the last day of cannolis and fig cookies and then in the summer it was just ice-cream. And then around October stopped the ice-cream and made the--it was cooler, so he stopped the ice-cream and made his cannolis and cookies. He even made a little sandwich, a special Sicilian sandwich that he made in the winter months.

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SR: What was that like?

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AB: It was--it was called the vastedda It's--it was a sandwich almost like on a little bun with ricotta cheese, caciocavallo, you know, and they used a meat on it which was a spleen meat. **[*Laughs*]** And there was--that was fried in olive oil and put on the bread, and they still make them in--in Palermo. We've seen them in Palermo.

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SR: Do you like them?

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AB: I like them but without the spleen meat. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: Wow, that's so interesting that different times of year it was a different store.

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AB: Right. He didn't--you know, that was the tradition in Sicily and of course there was no refrigeration so you couldn't do cannoli in the summer; it would spoil.

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SR: Right.

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AB: So he made it with ricotta cheese--everything was made--and still is--from scratch.

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SR: What--what was his personality like--Angelo, your grandfather?

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AB: He was--I didn't know him; I can only go by what--what family talked about and said, but he was a very, very family oriented man, very--a loving man but just don't get him mad. **[*Laughs*]** He had a bad temper if you really pushed him, but he was a good man, hard-working, believed in work. He--he loved what he did; he loved to--to--to bake and make quality products for people to enjoy. And he--so he--they said what he did--the work that he did my dad said all his sons put together couldn't do it. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: He was pretty hard-working?

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AB: Right.

00:24:11

SR: So you're the third generation. Who--who came between, like after--who took over the shop after Angelo?

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AB: After my--my grandfather died, my dad and--my dad was the second to youngest of the boys--the second youngest in the family actually but there were--my grandmother had five children and there were four boys and one girl, and my dad and my Uncle Joe who was a little bit older, about two years older than my dad, they continued the business along with my grandmother. My grandmother worked with the business as well, and actually she made most of

the cookies and all that between having children. **[*Laughs*]** She mainly, you know, took care of--of the business end and she took care of helping make the products. So my dad and my Uncle Joe continued the business after my grandfather died and they continued doing basically the same thing he did. They didn't want to change anything; they didn't make a whole lot of improvements. The only thing they did was--was try to increase business because things were falling off on the retail end because people had moved out of the Quarter. They wanted to start packaging some items and putting them in some of the Italian oriented stores--places like the Zuppardo's and Aiavolasiti Bakery and--.

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SR: What was that bakery?

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AB: Aiavolasiti Bakery; it was Aiavolasiti.

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SR: Everlast?

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AB: Aiavolasiti.

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SR: Oh how do you spell that? **[*Laughs*]**

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AB: Aiavolasiti.

00:26:05

SR: Never heard of that one. Where was that?

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AB: Elysian Fields and Filmore.

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SR: Okay.

00:26:12

AB: And places like that Ferrara's Supermarket; there was a place called Papp's Supermarket in Gentilly, Compagno's; there were some little independent owned grocers around so they--and Italian restaurants--started selling spumoni to different Italian restaurants and so they--they eventually got into that area, but still it was just a two-man operation. It was my dad and my uncle and we would work--the boys when we became about nine years-old--we had to go to the shop you know on the weekends and in the summer months. You just couldn't hang around the house. We had to do something.

00:26:55

SR: No videogames?

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AB: No, there was no such thing as videogames. You had to go to the shop, you know, and sweep the floor and clean the tables and squeeze lemons or--do something. You worked a few hours a day--it was about four hours a day doing something and then you were free to go. If you wanted to come back at night, when it was busier, and wait on customers and on tables and make some tips, you could.

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SR: You could?

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AB: You could.

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SR: Did you like it? Did you like being at the shop?

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AB: Yeah, I enjoyed it. We all enjoyed it because it was family there. My grandmother was there, my aunts. She had a kitchen in the back that she'd cook dinner, and we had an uncle and aunt that lived upstairs on the second floor and so it was--it was just like being at home, you know. It was a family--.

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SR: So you started--well let me ask you quickly what was your father's name--or is?

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AB: No; my--my father passed away in 1982 and my father was Angelo, Junior and he--he worked in the business until he--until he passed away. You know he--we--he was a little reluctant to come here in Carrollton--with the changes and didn't know anybody and, you know, we left--after my mother passed away we sold the house in the Quarter and we moved to Gentilly, and he didn't like it because he said that he don't know anybody. And everybody is in their house; nobody is--in the French Quarter, people would be sitting on their steps in the afternoon you know, and in the evening, and then you'd stop and talk with this one and that one and the other one and stuff. So it was just a whole different environment.

00:28:43

SR: Yeah.

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AB: So he got used to it here after--we were only here about three years before he passed away and--but he got used to--and got familiar with some of the--the business people around and--and then of course he'd see some of the regular customers, so he was content with that. But he--so he--he was a very personable person, my--my dad. He--he had a lot of personality, and he was just kind of a one of a kind person. **[*Laughs*]** People would just attract to him.

00:29:25

SR: Really?

00:29:26

AB: So he--as I say he--he enjoyed it. I mean he was tired out from working all those years and he just you know--he was just worn out.

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SR: Did he work--did he work in the shop pretty much his whole life or did he have--?

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AB: Yeah, that's--that's the only thing he ever did.

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SR: And what about you? Did you do anything in between?

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AB: No, I didn't. I'm the only one in the family that didn't do anything in between. I was--I was a student at Loyola and actually I was going into accounting and I majored in accounting and graduated in 1974.

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SR: Well that's something in between.

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AB: Yes, but I used to help my dad on the weekends and in the summer I would work over there with him, and then in 1973 my uncle retired. He had problems with his--his legs and he couldn't do the type of work anymore. So my dad decided that he didn't know what he was going to do and I said *I'll help you* and, you know, *we'll work it out*; so--.

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SR: So that was the--during college or right after college?

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AB: Yeah, I was still--I was still on my last year--my last year and I had about a year and a half to go. So I would, you know, work at the shop and my schedule was you know I would try to arrange my schedule so that I could do some delivering around working at the shop, and when I graduated, instead of continuing on I just stayed in the business. Here I am today 33 years later. **[*Laughs*]** Still--

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SR: We're grateful for it.

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AB: I'm still managing this; my brother--my brother Angelo worked with us. He was working at the Jax Brewery at the time, and he came to work with us here in the family and he--he came to work with us, you know in the evenings after work and then he came on full-time later on. And my other brother and sister they—Sal and Nikki, they had other jobs and we needed the additional help as time went on so we recruited them to come in and work with us; and my youngest sister, who is handicapped, she--she would come after we opened up here in Carrollton and do some of the bookwork and answer the phones, and you know. My wife, Jolie, has been working with me since before we were married.

00:32:18

SR: Really?

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AB: Yeah, when we were dating she would come at the--at the--I'd pick her up to go to the shop on Ursulines Street at the time. And Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons—she worked with me and then we would go out after that--after we closed. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: That's neat. Could you spell her name for me?

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AB: J-o-l-i-e--Jolie.

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SR: So that's French?

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AB: French--she's French and Dutch. Her mother is from Holland and her dad was actually born and raised in Lakeview. He was of French descent.

00:32:51

SR: So, but she's got the Italian in her now.

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AB: Yeah, she's got the Italian in her now.

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SR: So right at the moment are there other family members involved in the business right now?

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AB: Well there's still my--my brothers and sister are still--my sister Nikki and my brother Angelo are--.

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SR: Oh okay, so they still all are?

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AB: They're still working, right; they're--plus they're getting older now and, you know, they're past retirement age and not working as much. They're not as full--full-time as they used to be.

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SR: So you're the youngest?

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AB: Yeah; I'm the youngest. I have one brother, Sal, who's still full-time, and myself and Jolie. Since Katrina, I mean we had a cousin that worked with us. She lived on the Gulf Coast; her house was wiped out and. She was with us before she passed retiring age too; she was still coming in and working, but since Katrina she hasn't been back. And my dad's youngest brother, after he retired--Roy--he--he is in a nursing home now. He's going to be 90 years-old on St. Joseph's Day.

00:33:57

SR: On St. Joseph's Day?

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AB: Yeah; and he--he would come--after he retired--he was a butcher all his life. He didn't stay in the ice-cream business, and he would come a couple days a week and help us, you know, making cannolis and working up front and so—so, before Katrina.

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SR: What about the next generation? Is there anyone from the youngest generation?

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AB: No, not really. They've all worked here at some point in time but no one ever took that much of an interest to stay--unfortunately.

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SR: Not yet.

00:34:33

AB: Not yet; no, they're all getting up there now. Most of them are all in their 40s. And I have two nephews and two nieces, and then my son who is 20, and he doesn't express an interest in it. **[*Laughs*]** He's been around it all of his life; he has his own interests and we respect that. I wouldn't want to--you'd have to really love the place and you'd have to want to do it. And we were not pushed into it. In fact we were always discouraged from working the business and carrying on the business because it was too many hours and you have no free time; it's a seven-day-a-week operation. You know, *there's no time off; go to school and be a doctor, be a lawyer, be--*. **[*Laughs*]** They looked upon the work as a physical work and as being too demanding. Everyone wants better for their children so they discouraged us from working--and how we wound up--we all wound up in the business. So I don't know what the future is going to bring. We're just taking it day to day. We'll see what happens. I've got some years left hopefully. **[*Laughs*]**

00:36:01

SR: Oh yeah. No, you're so young I can't--I can't believe--it's hard to imagine looking at you that you were part of that generation that lived in the French Quarter.

00:36:12

AB: Right.

00:36:12

SR: Because I think of that as like a century ago, you know, just because it's so different and I'm not from here; so--. Well let me--let's talk a little bit about what you sell here. How--how many--do you call it ice-cream or gelato?

00:36:28

AB: Gelato.

00:36:32

SR: Oh, I can pause this. Okay, we're back after a little pause. So yeah; do you call it ice-cream or gelato?

00:36:42

AB: Gelato.

00:36:44

SR: And--

00:36:45

AB: Gelato.

00:36:46

SR: What's the difference?

00:36:47

AB: Well gelato is the Italian word for ice-cream. The only--the difference between gelato and regular ice-cream--American ice-cream--is that you have less fat as far as butter fat goes. The flavors are more intense and the--the product is more dense; you have less air in it. Ours is a custard base; in other words, it's a thin custard and it's just cooked--has eggs in it. So what you lose in fat on the milk fat you add in fat on the eggs. **[*Laughs*]**

00:37:25

SR: Right; so it's not a low fat product?

00:37:28

AB: Not--no; not a low fat product. Now the ices have no fat; the ice is a granita; it has no--no dairy products. It's fresh fruit, sugar, and water. But you do have sugar. So that's basically what--that's basically in a nutshell what gelato is, and we have a lot of special flavors. The freezing

process is different than regular ice-cream and it's basically because of the air that's whipped in. We have a machine that turns a lot slower than a regular ice-cream--. A regular ice-cream, it whips faster and it's whipped faster and it has more air incorporated in it. So it's a lighter product. We do 24 different flavors of dipped gelato; between that and the Italian ices--and that's something that we introduced, the dipped products--I introduced that when we opened here on Carrollton in 1979 and brought in a lot of the imported flavorings from Sicily.

00:38:39

SR: Before that you only had the sliced--?

00:38:42

AB: Before that we only had--

00:38:43

SR: And the ice?

00:38:43

AB: We only had the sliced ice-cream, which was spumoni; we had spumoni, cassata, torroncino; we had pistachio. We had vanilla, chocolate and we had the ice in lemon ice, strawberry ice, peach ice whenever it was in season--lemon we had--the lemon was made at one time just in the summer months, but strawberry we made only when Louisiana strawberries were in season, which was about a two-month period. So it wasn't until we opened here on Carrollton that we did the different products. And that has expanded our business quite a bit. And we--as far

as the baked goods, we did the cannoli and the mini-cannoli and we did the variety of Italian cookies--the biscottis; the other pastries we added here on Carrollton as time went on. We introduced a lot of things--some things that I created myself, some things that were formulations that my grandfather had that we had never used and he would make once in a while.

00:40:02

SR: Like what as an example?

00:40:03

AB: Well like the cassata cakes--you've seen cassata cakes; it was a special ordered thing. And then there was the pasticciotti, which is an apple-filled pastry. We make that still just around the holidays, but that was something that he would make, and crème--crème puffs, the St. Joseph's crème puff, which has a ricotta filling. We do that around St. Joseph's Day, but we introduced regular crème puffs and we--we've evolved into some other areas that--or particularly, we try to keep particularly Italian or European, you know something like tiramisu cakes. That was a very recent development; that's not something that was around for years and years. That's a recent development over the last maybe 15--18 years. So we, you know, put them in formulation and then we started making tiramisu cakes. So we introduced a lot of new items, as I say, and have kept--with that we've been able to keep that interest in our business because if you stay with just a certain--any kind of business, if you stay with certain things and that's it, people get tired of it eventually. You have your key items, which are--are the most--the biggest seller like the cannoli and the spumoni and--but we have other products that we've introduced too and there are more

things that I have that he used to make and I introduce them from time to time, but since Katrina we haven't had time to deal with that. **[*Laughs*]**

00:41:50

SR: Yeah, well it's funny because like my favorite flavor is the--zuppa inglese--and I feel like I'm--it's funny to learn that it's a relatively new product because to me it seems like--it feels old-fashioned.

00:42:07

AB: Well it--we've been doing it for 20--25 years now. **[*Laughs*]**

00:42:11

SR: Yeah, and what--can you describe that flavor?

00:42:14

AB: It--the best way to describe it is a rum custard; it's a--like a custard and it has like a little rum taste to it. It's--

00:42:24

SR: And then it has chocolate chips in it.

00:42:25

AB: Chocolate chips, yeah.

00:42:27

SR: It's so good. It reminds me of eggnog a little bit.

00:42:28

AB: Right, right; that's the--it has almost like an eggnog based product. I mean he would make things occasionally like the chestnut, all right.

00:42:39

SR: Chestnut gelato?

00:42:39

AB: The chestnut gelato--he'd make it, but it wasn't served in a cone. It was served right from the ice-cream machine in a glass. And so there was no such thing as--as a cone or a cup; it was a glass--it was a glass. The lemon ice was just served in--in a glass from the machine. The old type ice and salt machine, you know--you know barrel packed with ice and so when you take the blade out and then you just take and scoop it out of there with a spoon and fill the glass and then as a kid we used to fill the lemon ice from a can after you'd make it, and we'd make it in the freezer and fill the glass up to the top with it, you know. The same thing with the strawberry; we'd have our ice--but there wasn't a lot of that. Most of it and--and at the time even in Sicily there wasn't such a thing as a dipped ice-cream in a cone. It was served in a glass and if there were any--and it didn't have--plus they didn't have freezers or refrigeration. When we learned the trade there was one case with 24 different flavors. They didn't even have such a thing as a

case, you know, so how could they have 24 different ice-cream machines and then they had one or two flavors of the day. People today want more variety and, you know, because we're used to a Baskin Robbins of 31 flavors. So we've--we've evolved a bit.

00:44:10

SR: Right, it seems like the--the really popular flavor that I see people getting here too is the--I don't know how to pronounce it but the chocolate chip that's like really finely--?

00:44:19

AB: Stracciatella.

00:44:20

SR: Yeah. Did you introduce that one?

00:44:22

AB: Yes; uh-hm.

00:44:24

SR: What about the recipes that you used you know that your grandfather made? How do you--do you have those recipes written down or are they all in your head or--?

00:44:35

AB: Well they're written down. Things that you do regularly all the time you don't need to look at it; it's all in your head. You just go and do, you know--I can make most things here without even going to look. I mean if it's something I make now and then well I'll take a look because I can't remember exactly what you know--so I'll go look it up. But we've started to put some of them on the computer so that we don't lose our papers like we did with Katrina. **[*Laughs*]**

00:45:03

SR: Did you lose your recipes?

00:45:04

AB: Well we had--I had more than one copy. **[*Laughs*]** But I had copies here that we used to work with on a daily basis and I had those in--in my office, and I dried them out **[*Laughs*]** so they--they survived; we dried them out.

00:45:25

SR: What about--can you talk about the--the--I mean, I call them cookies but you called the little baked goods that you make the biscotti?

00:45:34

AB: Biscotti.

00:45:35

SR: All of them--like would you call the fig cakes that?

00:45:38

AB: The fig cookies are called cuccidati. Basically almost all the Italian cookies are biscotti because biscotti means biscuit. And also they say twice-baked; some--some cookies are twice baked, but not all of them. By twice-baked I mean they're put in the oven and then baked one way and then you take them out and put it back in the oven **[*Laughs*]** to dry out some more. Because most of your Italian cookies are used not as a--a cookie just to eat like that. You know they--they were made to eat with wine, with coffee, and not just to eat as a snack, like they would--

00:46:31

SR: To dunk or whatever?

00:46:32

AB: --right. They were used to dip and that's why they--most of them don't have a lot of shortening in them; most of them are hard and dry. They were made to last. A lot of Sicilian cookies like we make are--are of Arabic origin. And they were used to travel; they were--you know they were used to keep a long time, so they wouldn't get stale or get moldy. So hence they're all biscottis.

00:47:03

SR: That's kind of the word for cookie maybe--a little bit?

00:47:06

AB: No, I think biscuits.

00:47:08

SR: And what different kinds do you make?

00:47:09

AB: Well make the biscotti di regina, which is the most popular--it's a sesame seed cookie--the biscuit of the Queen. We make the--all of them have a different name. We have different colored cookies that are very popular for St. Joseph's Day, but they all have a different name. The spiced ones--and then the white ones are called catalani and the ones with the chocolate icing are the same cookie but they're called tatù.

00:47:42

SR: You said they have chocolate in them?

00:47:43

AB: Chocolate and then we have the--the pink and the yellow; they're the taralli d'uova, which means the yolk of the egg because they look like an egg yolk. And then there are the biscotti anicini and, you know, biscotti alla mandoria, which are the almond and anise toast. Those types of cookies, and see that's what today have become popular--is the biscotti--but the type you see in coffee houses are very hard and they're with nuts and all different kinds of concoctions that they've devised. Those are Tuscan type, which is different; those are more like a dough, which is

rolled out and flattened and baked in a loaf and sliced and then re-toasted and they become really very hard. The Sicilian type that we make are made from a batter; it's a very soft and you can--when you bake them they're spongy. You bag them up and they're spongy. And then you can either use them as a spongy type cookie, or you put them back in the oven to toast them and they become dry and crisp--not hard.

00:49:13

SR: And that's what you do right? You do the twice-baked?

00:49:15

AB: Right; and they're--they become crisp and those are used--you can use them to dip with coffee but they're not like Tuscan type which are hard but stay together. They don't break apart. These are used basically to eat with ice-cream and to eat with the ices. You take the anise cookie and you eat that with the lemon ice, or the almond toast with the lemon ice, which you can take the anise toast and you dip it in the lemon ice, and that's good. **[*Laughs*]**

00:49:50

SR: That sounds good. I've never done that.

00:49:55

AB: So we have those, and then we have the fig--the fig cookies and the fig cookies are another one that is very, very important in the St. Joseph celebration. And there's a lot of work involved in fig cookies because you have to grind the figs and raisins, and if you put nuts in it or fruit and

whatever, and you have to make a syrup in order to soften them and you have to roll your--to make your dough and roll it out…and the figs…and roll them up and cut them and bake them and ice them.

00:50:25

SR: Really, lots of steps.

00:50:26

AB: It's a lot of steps involved and--and we--we can make them into different shapes and so that's--that's one of the others. And then we have a number--numerous others that--some are made with egg white; some are--are made with--I guess one of them that we make that you wouldn't call a biscotti would be called pastini di mandorle It's called a pastini because it's--it's more soft when you--and has the egg white and it spreads out different. It doesn't have any flour in it and it's more of a--almost like a meringue type cookie. So then they have just plain biscottis, which is made with milk and you just roll them and you can put a little icing on them if you want. But it's basically, biscotti is the general word for an Italian cookie.

00:51:28

SR: Yeah, and the fig cookies are really popular, like you said, for St. Joseph's Day, which is March 19th.

00:51:36

AB: Right.

00:51:36

SR: A big holiday here.

00:51:39

AB: Right.

00:51:40

SR: You must be gearing up for that.

00:51:41

AB: Yeah. We usually start after--after the Christmas holidays. We have a little bit of a lull with which we catch up from the holiday and we try to start baking because then most of our cookies are able to be stored, and the St. Joseph's Day--I mean, everything is at one time and it's all cookies, cookies, cookies. You know, we wait until the last to make the fig cookies especially, because we want them to be--the fig to stay nice and soft, so we make them in different shapes, and we even make the different figures--religious figures like the crucifix and the shepherd's staff and the--the chalice and--.

00:52:22

SR: Oh you do--for people to put on their altars?

00:52:24

AB: Right. People buy them to put on their altars--people that don't make them themselves. Now we don't make the--the fancy lace kind like you'd see. That's--that's something you--commercially you cannot make.

00:52:35

SR: No; they get very intricate.

00:52:36

AB: Right, right; that's something that--an art that's passed from one generation to the next--people to do at home--something that's a labor of love. **[*Laughs*]**

00:52:48

SR: Yeah.

00:52:49

AB: So those types we don't--we don't even venture into. But, you know, and we have the different shapes and our fillings, almost like a cake. And we decorate it and they look very nice. They're not--they're not as ornate--not nearly ornate as, you know, some are.

00:53:07

SR: Yeah, but people put them on their altars.

00:53:09

AB: Right.

00:53:10

SR: Can you--can you say for the record why the Sicilians honor St. Joseph every year?

00:53:18

AB: Well it goes back to the famines in Sicily, and St. Joseph is the patron of the family; he was a provider for Mary and Joseph and also the patron of Sicily **[*Banging Noise*]**. When there were famines people prayed to St. Joseph for rain for the crops to grow. There was nothing to eat; the only thing they had that would grow was fava beans, and the fava beans they used to feed the animals. When we were kids I heard them call them horse beans.

00:54:02

SR: That's what you called fava?

00:54:02

AB: They called--they were called horse beans. And the people would--that's what the people survived on--the fava beans. They would cook them and then eat them and that's why they call them lucky beans, because they were lucky to have them to survive. They prayed to Saint Joseph to intercede for them to have rain so that their crops would grow and when the rains would come, the crops would grow and what they did--they made altars of food in his honor. That's what they--they grew--they grew from an agrarian society so they--they put altar food on his feast day, and they fed the poor and they had a feast. And that's how the tradition grew and it was carried

on here to America when the Sicilian immigrants in New Orleans, having such an intense Sicilian population--they brought these traditions with them. And it was not only--became not only to pray to Saint Joseph for the food; it was to pray to Saint Joseph for anything you may need. **[*Laughs*]**

00:55:01

SR: Right.

00:55:03

AB: And if your favor was granted you'd put up an altar of food. Some people made promises, if this particular favor were granted they'd put it up for their rest of their lives, and many of these older Italian ladies, they did it all their lives because it was thanks-giving for the favor that was granted or it could be in petition for something. So they put altars of food and--and anyone who could--who came to their home--people had these altars in their home and in their living room. And you came--they fed you; people off the street didn't know them. And today that's changed because they're afraid to let people in your house but **[*Laughs*]**--as a kid, when we were growing up there was still that--and you never denied anyone that plate of food. And they came and they feasted with you.

00:56:03

SR: So someone in your family did that?

00:56:04

AB: My mother--my mother had several altars at home, and then she had a couple of them over at the St. Louis Cathedral school, and then my grandmother had an altar in the store--on Ursulines Street. And they had that for quite a number of years, and then they stopped for a while and then they had it again. We still in--in--in the--we still do it to keep up the tradition; we put a small--very small display up with just cookies and breads and fava beans and--just in commemoration of Saint Joseph's Day and you know--and--and continuing that tradition and keeping it alive. People will come see what the Saint Joseph altar--at least miniature looks like. **[*Laughs*]**

00:56:58

SR: Yeah, I've--I've come for your altar before.

00:57:01

AB: We don't do the foods. We--we did it a few times, but it's a lot to do and we don't do the pasta dinner and all that. It's basically--

00:57:11

SR: It's your high season.

00:57:12

AB: Right. And we--and traditionally we would have a dish on the table that--or a bowl that they would collect any donations and they would give it to some charity because any--anything that was put on the Saint Joseph altar is come out of your pocket. You don't take the expenses

out of the collection; it came out of your pocket or the sacrifice or the--the work to make the altar--or usually got help--family, friends to help you make--it was the work that you put into it. And then anything in the collection would go to a certain charity or to a church or--and we did that.

00:57:59

SR: There is also a tradition I know when you go--when you go to an altar you get a little goody bag of maybe some cookies and a fava bean and a piece of bread--.

00:58:07

AB: Right, right that had evolved--you know it's like the Italian people; you go eat at their house and take something home with you.

00:58:13

SR: Yeah.

00:58:14

AB: All right, well, *take this home with you*. Well it evolved in that way so it became a tradition that people expected to get a little bag of something from the table. So--so it's changed and it's become the little bag that you know--just because if you wrap something up—*oh, take this and take this*. They're not going to leave without--you ate but then you're going to leave--not going to leave without taking something with you. *Take this with you because there's so much stuff and it will go bad. So take this with you; take that with you*. And that's how--.

00:58:42

SR: What about the--you know how you get a little piece of stale bread sometimes that--

00:58:46

AB: Right.

00:58:46

SR: --that people store it until there's a hurricane?

00:58:50

AB: Right, right, right.

00:58:52

SR: Did people do that growing--when you were growing up? Did they--

00:58:53

AB: Yeah.

00:58:54

SR: --and so can you talk about that a little bit?

00:58:55

AB: The blessed bread--the altar table is blessed by the priest and he prays over it, and the blessed Saint Joseph bread--you kept that and you didn't throw that away. You could eat it--you could eat it stale if you wanted with coffee, eat it--but you didn't throw it in the garbage can, all right. You kept it in your house as a--as a--as a protection and when--if there was a storm or heavy rain storm you'd take a piece of that bread and you'd throw it out into the storm to say a prayer and ask Saint Joseph to kind of quiet the storm.

00:59:39

SR: Right.

00:59:40

AB: You can believe it works or you don't believe it works.

00:59:48

SR: You grew up with people doing that though?

00:59:50

AB: Yeah.

00:59:51

SR: And did you do that before Katrina?

00:59:54

AB: I didn't throw it out and that was my mistake. **[*Laughs*]**

00:59:56

SR: You think it would have been different?

00:59:59

AB: We--we took a piece--it would have been a major miracle if everybody there was a flood around except us. **[*Laughs*]** But we took--we had a piece in the building in the back and before we left we put it on the table, but at least the water didn't get that high. **[*Laughs*]**

01:00:19

SR: Well maybe that's why.

01:00:21

AB: Right, but we--we didn't throw it out. Now my--my brother, he threw it out before he left. His house didn't flood. **[*Laughs*]**

01:00:32

SR: Oh. **[*Laughs*]** What neighborhood was his house in?

01:00:37

AB: It was in Metairie and the house next door flooded. **[*Laughs*]**

01:00:40

SR: Oh really?

01:00:42

AB: The houses around him flooded but his house didn't flood. It wasn't as--like in New Orleans. But I do--.

01:00:48

SR: Is he attributing that to Saint Joseph?

01:00:50

AB: Yeah. I do know that the night in May--was it the May 3rd flood when we had 17-inches of rain?

01:01:01

SR: What year was that?

01:01:03

AB: Two years back.

01:01:04

SR: Yeah.

01:01:04

AB: Two years back--we were stuck here; came to close and we couldn't get back home because it was pouring. And the streets were starting to--the flood; we never had streets flood, you know, in Carrollton. All the rains that we've had and all the floods and everything we--we have never had water even accumulate in the street here. On the other side of the street it was flooded. And it was just pouring and the water was coming up and it was up on the sidewalk. And we had Saint Joseph bread and I threw it out. The rain stopped, and we were here all night but the rain stopped. It took a long time for the water to go down, and about 5 o'clock in the morning we were able to leave. But we never flooded inside. **[*Laughs*]**

01:01:50

SR: Wow. Maybe it was the bread. Do you have bread--oh no?

01:01:53

AB: No, we don't have any. I've lost it all. **[*Laughs*]**

01:01:57

SR: Yeah, but you can store up next month.

01:02:00

AB: Right. And after--right next month we'll--we'll have some more.

01:02:04

SR: So how much water did you have in here for Katrina?

01:02:06

AB: We had about four and a half feet.

01:02:09

SR: And can you talk about what you changed when you renovated, or not changed?

01:02:16

AB: Well we really didn't change a lot in here. We had just done our renovations prior to Katrina. We weren't even finished. We had--we had a few things still yet to do. We did the renovation and the expansion of the seating area where we're--where we're at right now for our 100th anniversary, which was July 24, 2005. And so when we put things back together after Katrina we just--we had to get all new cases and--and tear out the walls. Now we've put the store back the way it was. We didn't want to change a lot; people enjoyed coming to this--the atmosphere that we had for the—well, that old-world feeling, and we didn't want to compromise that. So we've got a lot of our light fixtures and fans and all that were--survived; our pictures survived miraculously. They were a little--some were a little damp but the--they all were in tact and so we just put everything back to the way we had it because most of our changes that we made were in the production area, where we--we did the two production rooms all over again--the walls and all. But in the retail store, you know, outside of changing the floor in this raised area and--and the equipment--everything else--and the counter--the counter in the back--everything else was put back.

01:04:04

SR: Like the same--so you have the same café tables here, right?

01:04:06

AB: The same tables. We have new tops on the ones that--that--that have the laminate tops. We have a few of the old glass-type tables, but the tops are the same. The chairs--we had them sand-blasted; some of them didn't survive. The saltwater ate through them.

01:04:24

SR: Oh really, because they're metal?

01:04:27

AB: They're metal seats and so we had to get some new--new ones. But other than that everything has--.

01:04:36

SR: And then how long did it take you to reopen?

01:04:40

AB: Thirteen months--Katrina was in August and we reopened the end of September--we opened September 23rd, my dad's birthday, so it was 13 months almost to the day that we--that we reopened.

01:04:59

SR: And what has the--what has the response been like? Was it what you expected or--?

01:05:06

AB: It was overwhelming. It was much more than I expected. I--I figured we'd be busy because of the amount of calls we were getting and--but I never dreamed we'd have the crowds that we had when we opened. And the crowds lasted for at least eight weeks. And then it became a little more manageable. And it's--it's getting back to our normal now--business. We--we're still very busy in the evenings. We still don't have our--our hours--regular hours back yet; we're still a little short staffed and there's only so many hours a day I can put in. And we--I mean the retail--we're closed two days a week--Monday and Tuesday--but we were a seven-day operation before, which we're still producing you know on the days that we're closed, but we need those days in order to catch up with the sales and try to get our business back under footing, you know, with less help in the production area. It's difficult to have, you know, product to sell.

01:06:28

SR: There's still a lot of staffing problems in the city.

01:06:31

AB: Yes, there is and I think there will be some for some time to come. Now while next month--March we're going to start reopening on a Tuesday but we'll remained closed on Monday and we'll start opening on Tuesday and extending our hours a little on Sunday--to nine. We've been

closing at eight on Sundays and, a little at a time, by April or May we hope to get back to our regular 10:00 p.m. closing on the weekdays. We just will wait and see how things go--taking it one step at a time.

01:07:12

SR: So this oral history project that I'm working on is, I'm interviewing the--the 13 entities that the Southern Foodways Alliance awarded with the *Guardian of the Tradition*. What--I mean, I guess that maybe even is more meaningful now than before Katrina. What--what does that mean to you to be a guardian of the culinary tradition in New Orleans?

01:07:35

AB: Well it means a lot because it--there's so many dying traditions. There's so many--it's so difficult for a small business to keep up today, to keep up with the demands of--it's--it's a personal burden and a lot of times I tell--I tell my wife, I said you know*, people just don't live like we do anymore*. **[*Laughs*]** And then you--your life basically is--it revolves around your business. And these people today you know they--they're off and a lot of their leisure time, they want to enjoy their time and you know it takes us--when we go on vacation it takes us three days just to unwind. **[*Laughs*]** So we--in order for places like us to survive we have to gear it in a way that we can have a little breathing room and that's the one thing that I'm taking a second look at after Katrina--Katrina that, you know, we have to--things are very fragile and we have to--in order to preserve things, you have to also not overwork them.

01:09:01

SR: Preserve yourself.

01:09:02

AB: Yourself right, and--and it's just something that I've never thought about before. You just do and do and do our thing--but as you're getting older, and when things like this happen you have to--you have to take a second look. And it's--it's a lot of pride that we put into our work and we want to have the best product that we can have. We enjoy the--coming out and greeting the public and talking with them. It's a personable--personal business. It's--it's not just *well, this is a chain restaurant*; you know, you come in and you can see the same thing every place you go. I mean you're--you come in and the owners are there; someone in the family is here most of the time that you know--even if it's just a smile and making sure that--that you say hello and making sure that things are--are operating properly the way you want them. You have a certain standard that you don't want to go below because it's your name on the business. It's your--it's your hard work that's going into it, so you want--you want it to work well and you want--you have something special that you want to offer people.

01:10:26

SR: Did you consider not reopening after Katrina?

01:10:29

AB: Um--

01:10:29

SR: I mean not immediately, because everything was so unsure but--?

01:10:35

AB: Yeah, I didn't know whether we would be able to return here. I knew I had to go ahead--I had to still work to make a living. **[*Laughs*]** There was a choice of either getting a job somewhere in some type of food service business, or opening up the store someplace else. And when we were told at first that you couldn't come back because they wouldn't have the water pumped out for six months, you couldn't go back home for maybe three months, you know--that's a long time. The question was, would these buildings survive? What would six months of these--these facilities under water, the equipment under water for six months--there's no way--there's no way anything would survive. We had some insurance but not nearly enough to put things back to the--what we had. We didn't know what the condition of the population is going to be. How can we open up to something that we--we didn't have any people back? So we had several considerations. We were in Houston and we thought about opening up a little place in Houston, a little retail store. And we looked around because all we had was time on our hands. And we looked around and nothing seemed like home. It was very suburban, and it just didn't have that same feeling. There were some areas downtown that were--might have been more of New Orleans, the older section of the city. Then we had Hurricane Rita. **[*Laughs*]** And then we began to think, you know--we were thinking more along the line of Baton Rouge; it's still Louisiana. Louisiana for all of its problems has a culture of its own, more of a European culture than Texas. So I said well, maybe we should think on seeing some friends in--in Baton Rouge, and we were looking around there. And we started thinking about, well if we weren't coming back here most people who--we thought that most people who lived in New Orleans wanted to

stay near home, so they would probably relocate to Baton Rouge or someplace north of the lake. You know, so this was our area we were known, so we thought about possibly doing something in Baton Rouge. And after we got here and, you know, we--we assessed the damage and all that and first we had to clean out the building. We couldn't leave things the way they were. So once the buildings were cleaned out--cleared out--we looked at it all and said *well, it doesn't look so bad*--as it looked before. It smelled bad but it doesn't look bad. And there was still a population in Jefferson Parish and Uptown--well if we you know--we had the property sitting there; if we opened and even if we opened just a few days a week and, you know, put together part of the production facility, where we make enough product just to sell here and maybe have two little places that might be around, you know and we'll just--we needed something to start. And we were able to work out something with the people at the La Spiga Bakery, where we baked cookies over there during--I got a feel for what businesses was still around and once we started baking the cookies, which was February, and started putting them out in some of the locations that we had in Jefferson and--I mean, they were just flying off the shelves. We said *well, there is still a market here*. It was almost like a test I guess. And in the meantime when we were working on redoing this building so we could at least get a little something going because we did have customers in the French Quarter--of course we didn't know how much business they were doing, so it was that point when we didn't know what we were going to do. We just--we were just meandering along and seeing what was going to happen.

01:15:35

SR: Just felt your way through it, huh?

01:15:37

AB: Right, and so we made the decision just to do this building first and the two buildings--to do this building in Carrollton first, where we could be self-contained with the retail store, ice-cream production and bakery all in one, and we could do a little bit of the wholesale because we knew we didn't have many employees and fortunately most of our bakery employees came back. And that's how we decided to--to reopen and, like I said, the response we had when we opened was overwhelming and looking at it now I guess we made the right decision for right now.

01:16:15

SR: Right.

01:16:15

AB: I mean, we don't know what the future of the city is going to be but we'll just take it day to day.

01:16:25

SR: And fortunately this neighborhood, I mean this immediate neighborhood, a lot of people took the same leap of faith it seems like.

01:16:31

AB: Yes.

01:16:32

SR: There's movement here.

01:16:33

AB: Right. There is a little movement, and I think the--the established businesses--people who were established before Katrina and doing well, I think they will continue to do well. New business is going to be more of a challenge. There are some people in this area, but not a lot--some toward Esplanade, toward City Park Avenue, Uptown, sprinklings of people starting in Lakeview, so they have to come from other areas here. And we--we do some neighborhood business but our--our appeal is broad, so we bring people from all places here, as well as some of the other restaurants. So it's--it's going to take some time.

01:17:24

SR: I do see all kinds of people in here though, like all different generations, different--

01:17:27

AB: Yes.

01:17:27

SR: --races, different economic--which is great.

01:17:34

AB: Yeah, it's--it's a multi-cultural **[*Laughs*]**--it's not just Italian.

01:17:40

SR: Right. Well I guess everyone is a little Italian when they come in here.

01:17:44

AB: Right.

01:17:46

SR: Well I'm going to thank you for giving me this time, and for giving SFA this time, Mr. Brocato.

01:17:47

[End Arthur Brocato Interview]