

Interviewers: William Braswell and Simone Delorme

Interviewee: Roland Schneider

Transcription: Suzanne Davidson

Interviewer 1: Okay, so right now we're recording. So, we're just going to ask you a few different questions about your life, and a lot of questions about food, and your experiences cooking.

Roland: No problem with that.

Interviewer 1: So, the first question, could you just state your name for us?

Roland: Roland Schnider.

Interviewer 1: Roland Schnider. And where were you born?

Roland: In Switzerland.

Interviewer 1: Switzerland. Which part of Switzerland? The German, the French, the Italian-speaking?

Roland: The German-speaking part of it.

Interviewer 1: Zurich, or?

Roland: Lucerne

Interviewer 1: Oh, okay.

Interviewer 2: How long have you lived here in the United States?

Roland: Since October, 1980.

Interviewer 2: When you moved to the United States, where was the first place you lived?

Roland: Memphis.

Interviewer 2: Memphis? So you moved straight from Switzerland to Memphis?

Roland: Right.

Interviewer 1: How about after that? What are the different places you've lived here?

Roland: Actually, after Memphis, I pretty much moved to Mississippi. Red Banks, Mississippi.

Interviewer 1: Red Banks

Interviewer 2: When was that? When did you make the move to Mississippi?

Roland: [*pausing to think*]...1995.

Interviewer 1: Okay. From Red Banks where did you go in Mississippi?

Roland: I'm still in Red Banks.

Interviewer 1: When did you come to Oxford?

Roland: Every day. I drive from Red Banks.

Interviewer 1: Ah, okay. So you commuted.

Roland: It's not that bad. Forty-five minutes.

Interviewer 1: I didn't realize it was so close.

Interviewer 2: When you were a boy, what did your parents do for a living? Were they involved in the culinary arts?

Roland: Actually, my dad had his own CPA firm? And when I started my apprenticeship for three years as a chef, he, on the side, opened up a restaurant. Two years after I started, he started a restaurant. On the side, he did both.

Interviewer 2: So, would you say he supported your decision to be a chef?

Roland: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer 2: Do you have any siblings? Like, in Switzerland or here?

Roland: Yes. An older brother and a younger sister, both in Switzerland.

Interviewer 2: Do you find it sort of difficult to maintain those relationships? How would you go about doing that?

Roland: No. Actually, I try once a year to go visit, to go to Switzerland.

Interviewer 1: You keep in touch on the phone?

Roland: Yeah, email...

Interviewer 1: Okay, technology, so it's not too tough. Could you tell us a little bit more about your schooling in Switzerland? Your experience? Was it middle school, high school there?

Roland: Yeah, we have this whole thing set up differently. We have eight years mandatory schools. That would be elementary and, if you want to put it that way, high school. And after that, you're basically on your own to do your apprenticeship for three years. But, I guess it's part of schooling.

Interviewer 1: Okay, yeah. What was your apprenticeship? Did you do your apprenticeship for three years?

Roland: Yeah.

Interviewer 1: Is there a certain specialty that you pick for that?

Roland: Not actually, but I did beforehand, right after I got out of school, I was fourteen and a half...

Interviewer 1: Oh wow. You were young.

Roland: I went for a year to the French-speaking part of Switzerland to learn French. Because, especially in Switzerland, all the menus and all the talk in the kitchen, you use the French words.

Interviewer 1: Interesting. So, the kitchen, it's in French.

Interviewer 2: I did not know that.

Roland: So, it does help you in the future. Then I had a contract. I had just turned seventeen. To start my apprenticeship at a hotel. You go one day a week to school. The rest, you work at the hotel.

Interviewer 2: I know that you and I have talked before about your time in the military.

Roland: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Did you learn any skills for cooking in the military? Was that part of what you did? Is there anything you can take from the military and apply to your job?

Roland: Eh... no, not really. We never did really eat that well.

[laughter]

Roland: They didn't have necessarily the same type of kitchens that we have. A lot of it was mobile. So the military, for the profession, the military didn't help.

Interviewer 1: How long were you in the military?

Roland: Eh...just basic training and that was pretty much it. That was when I was seventeen? I can't remember. It's too long ago. The way Switzerland works is that every male is required to military service. With exception if you have a health problem. You do your basic training and then every other year, you have to go for a three weeks repeating course.

Interviewer 1: Okay.

Roland: The year you don't go, you still have to take your [inaudible].Target shooting.

Interviewer 1: Okay.

Roland: It used to be that way. I know in the thirty-five plus years I have been in the states, things have changed. But, you basically do this until you're fifty. Then, I came to the United States, I had to pack up

everything in a box. It had my name on it, so if I came back in a year or two, I could have picked up my box and continue doing military service.

Interviewer 1: Every other year. Wow. Interesting.

Interviewer 2: In terms of Swiss culture, can you tell us a little bit about your experiences living within the country? Like, what are some of your most positive memories?

Roland: [*chuckles*]

Interviewer 1: Many of them? Big smile.

Roland: Especially if you live in Mississippi, the mountains is, of course, one thing. I used to snow ski. I used to manage a restaurant way up in the mountains. At a ski resort. Basically, every place you work, you learn something. To deal with the business side, with difficulties related to that. We were on a well, and the well froze, so we had to shut basically everything down until it thawed, or you had to melt some snow. To deliveries? There's no truck going up there to deliver. So, it was actually pretty interesting and different. Of course, I have never been to Colorado. They may have the same problems there, too.

Interviewer 1: What other places did you work in Switzerland, aside from that restaurant in the mountains?

Roland: A few. I was in a few places. I was in Geneva, that was in the mountains, too. The Matterhorn that is world famous. My home town in a few places. A couple, you do seasonal jobs. Summer season, and then winter season.

Interviewer 1: But for the most part, in the same industry. You stayed in restaurants, management, hotels.

Roland: Yeah.

Interviewer 2: As a funny little anecdote, you and I were talking the other night and you said you worked at the ski resort and you couldn't ski on your day off, right? Because if you got hurt, you wouldn't be able to work or something like that.

Roland: That was when I was with the military service. That was right before I actually had to start, I had a ski accident. On Saturday, and Monday I had to report for the military. So, I had to postpone the military there for a while. But for interesting stories, if you manage a restaurant in the mountains, you couldn't go to the bank every day. So, once a week, you put on your backpack with \$20,000 in there, and ski down.

Interviewer 1: Ski down? Could you imagine?

Roland: To make your deposit and get change.

[*laughter*]

Interviewer 2: That's, uh, definitely off the beaten path there.

Interviewer 1: You have to ski. You have to know how to ski!

Roland: Yeah.

Interviewer 2: In terms of being Swiss, and kind of being from that heritage, are there certain celebrations or rituals or customs that are still important to you to kind of maintain while living here in Mississippi?

Roland: Yes. Eh...yes and no. Around Christmas time, because of working in the restaurant business, you normally don't get off on the 24th, 5th or whatever. You normally celebrate Christmas, my family here and the kids, we got together one day between December 20th and January 2nd and celebrated Christmas. We did a special meal. It's called schweinepfeffer.

Interviewer 2: I'm going to attempt to spell that.

Roland: Schweinepfeffer.

Interviewer 2: Schweine... I'm going to butcher this.

Interviewer 1: We're going to have it here to listen to. Is there a translation? Or what is the meal?

Roland: Schweine is pig. And pfeffer would be, word for word translate as pepper, but that doesn't make any sense. It's a stew. It's almost like, I know you have heard of sauerbraten? But, it's a stew. It's something similar to that. When I grew up, we always had that particular meal on the 25th at my grandparents'.

Interviewer 2: And you're kind of bringing that from the old country to here.

Roland: Normally, we start off with...it doesn't necessarily go well together, but as an appetizer, we make cheese fondue.

Interviewer 1: I love cheese fondue. Great, great. What else would you have with that meal? What is kind of the tradition?

Roland: Mashed potato and spaghetti, the first plate. You take spaghetti, you put that stew on top of it. Portions you're going to take, it's like here. Thanksgiving, you eat too much, yeah? Mashed potato and that pork stew.

Interviewer 2: I'm assuming you drink a lot?

Roland: Oh...a little bit.

Interviewer 2: Eat, drink, and be merry.

Roland: There we go. We party the same way as you party.

[laughter]

Interviewer 1: Are there any other foods from Switzerland that are near and dear to your heart?

Roland: Brats. Swiss hash brown.

Interviewer 2: Chocolate.

Roland: Oh, of course chocolate.

Interviewer 1: Swiss hash browns. Is that like a potato dish?

Interviewer 2: What does that entail? Is it what I'm thinking of? or...

Roland: I can show you. I actually have a picture from when I was in Switzerland. Up 10,000 feet and I had that award of that dish at the restaurant. *[All three seem to be looking at a photo]* If I can find it. Actually, there is the schweinepfeffer.

Interviewer 2: Cool.

Interviewer 1: We need pictures of that. That's great. How about the ingredients? Are you able to get the ingredients you need here? The spices?

Roland: Oh yeah, yeah.

Interviewer 2: So, it's readily available in Oxford?

Roland: Yeah. Everywhere. Let me see, where is that picture?

Interviewer 2: In terms of like wanting to be a chef and really knowing what you wanted to do, was there kind of a singular moment that made you decide you wanted to be a chef? How did you go about making that decision?

Roland: I was five years old when I wanted to become a baker. My uncle had a bakery and I spent some vacation time there. Of course, ours was waiting for the end cuts of pies or whatever, so I could eat. Or he would give me a little piece of bread dough and I could throw this on the wall or play with it. I wanted to become a baker and when I was seven, I changed it because I knew the baker had to get up at two, three in the morning. I said, "Nope, this is not for me." And I changed it to want to become a chef. And in high school, they had more female students in, I don't know what you'd call that, cooking, sewing?

Interviewer 1: Oh yeah, like home ec. Classic.

Roland: I was the only male signed up for cooking.

Interviewer 1: We were just talking about that. I said I think sometimes in Switzerland it's mandatory to take cooking classes.

Roland: Actually, the guys take more woodworking. So, shop work. And I wanted to take cooking. This is the hash brown with the sunny-side-up egg on top. *[Roland is showing photos of this dish?]*

Interviewer 1: Look at this.

Interviewer 2: I never would have thought that it would look like that.

Interviewer 1: That's wonderful.

Interviewer 2: That looks delicious.

Interviewer 1: Would you be willing to send us a picture of that? Could we have it?

Roland: Sure.

Interviewer 2: Just send it to me.

Interviewer 1: That way we can write the name of the dish. Not familiar to most people here. That's great.

Interviewer 2: I'm just curious, how long have you been an actual chef, cooking in kitchens. Is it thirty-four years?

Roland: Let's see, I was done when I was nineteen. Nineteen and a half, or whatever. Let's say twenty years old. And I'm sixty-four now, so you add it up.

[laughter]

Roland: And I have always been in the restaurant business. Cooking or running my own place. I wouldn't know anything else to do. Or I wouldn't be good at anything else.

Interviewer 1: That's your love and passion.

Interviewer 2: That's what your talent, born to do, I guess.

Interviewer 1: Did you actually go to a culinary school? Did they teach you a specialty?

Roland: That's what the apprenticeship...The apprenticeship is the same thing as a culinary school. With the actual exception, in a culinary school, I think you get more of the theoretical things. Less practical school. The theoretical part. We had to do this on the side of the theoretical part. We had to write our own recipe book. Everything I learned at that hotel, how to do it. Of course, we learned it at school that many calculations or official things that you did not see or learn at your workplace, they were putting in all the specialty words. How you call a strainer or whatever . . . They didn't say "a strainer." Same as for cuts. They say, "cut me a julienne." It's all French. Those words specifically they're...I don't know how many pages in a book that you needed to know. Because when you're finished with your apprenticeship, you had two days of testing. One was an oral test, so you sit down with two experts and they can ask you anything they want and you have to answer. "What is the sauce?" "What is a soup called?"

Roland: Then you have to tell about it. Sometimes they say, "Tell me exactly how you make this." Sauce demi-glaze. What is au jus? What is...whatever. The second day, you actually, they, the same two experts, came to the kitchen in that hotel, walk through the coolers, "You've got a half a cow hanging up here." Or something. Or a whole lamb. "What do you feel like eating? We can do a lamb roast, or lamb chops," or whatever. Then they make the menu. Then you had time till noon to cook all this. From appetizer or soup to main course, including dessert. Then they ate it, and while they were eating, you had to calculate all your ingredients you used and how much the cost was for that particular meal. Then, in the afternoon, they came back in the kitchen and you had to debone the whole, take the whole veal apart, or they wanted to see if you could fillet a whole fish. Take a whole chicken apart properly. Make a little hors d'oeuvres thing or whatever. They want to see if you have an eye for it. Plate presentation as well. Sometimes they have, "Let's fix up this small container of whatever." Then you were done for the day. A couple of weeks later, you found out if you passed or failed.

Interviewer 1: Wow, that's intense. That sounds really intense.

Interviewer 2: Those are extensive requirements to become a chef.

Interviewer 1: And more so than a culinary school here. I don't think they teach you how to...

Roland: You know what I tell people? I forgot more than you ever will know.

[laughter]

Interviewer 1: I can imagine.

Roland: I think in my old recipe book, it had about thirty different ways to do potatoes.

Interviewer 1: Do you still have all of those?

Roland: I forgot it. Different cuts...

Interviewer 2: Seasonings, I guess.

Roland: Different preparations. And each potato had a name. The hash brown, the lionase potatoes.

Roland: [Lists several preparations for potatoes in French]. That's all the kind of potato I can think of.

Interviewer 1: Right, those are the only ones I'm familiar with.

Roland: [continues listing types of foods in French]. Half of them, I forgot.

Interviewer 1: Are these recipes of a particular culture? Are they French recipes, or Italian? Or did you just learn everything?

Roland: Pretty much, Switzerland is surrounded by Germany, France, Italy, Austria.

Interviewer 1: So, you get a little bit of each. You learned a fusion.

Roland: I try to tell everyone, the Swiss took all the recipes, stole them from the Italian, the French, the German, and made it better.

[laughter]

Interviewer 1: And they're the lucky ones that get to eat it. Very lucky, oh wow. So, it's really a fusion that you're learning how to make there in school.

Roland: It's really based on the traditional French cuisine.

Interviewer 1: Oh, okay. Based on traditional French cuisine. So, how about now? In terms of what you're cooking here? Do you take some of that influence?

Roland: The hardest part for me was to adjust... Give you an example, on a fish. We used to make, from fish bones, a stock. And we used that stock to make a sauce to put on the fish. When I first came here, that's what I did. That's how I learned it. Then people, customers were complaining that the fish tastes "fishy." And, first off, they make a joke out of it. "Okay, how is fish supposed to taste?" Yeah? It's like when you walk on the ocean, you can smell that fishy smell? Whenever you get on the ocean? We learned to not overpower it with seasoning, but with their own flavor. When you cook veal, you use veal stock. When you cook chicken, you use chicken stock. Beef, you use beef stock. When you cook fish, you use fish stock. To enhance the flavor.

Interviewer 1: Okay. Right.

Roland: Here, it was like, "No. It's too fishy."

Roland: I had to stop doing this to adjust more to the American taste.

Interviewer 1: So, you did have to change and adapt a little bit.

Interviewer 2: Sort of, the question I had kind of going off that idea was, do you ever find yourself either here, at the fraternity house or at home, kind of fusing the two things together? Cooking Swedish [sic] food with a southern flare, or adding Swedish food...

Interviewer 1: Swiss.

Interviewer 2: That's what I mean, Swiss.

[laughter]

Roland: Yes and no. I just told him in the kitchen today, "Do the meatloaf." Normally, he'll put some ketchup on top of it and bake it a little longer, the last ten minutes. I says, "Try something. Take a little ketchup, put it in a bowl, put a little barbeque sauce in there. Taste it and see how it goes together. If it is great, let's do it that way." So it's different than what people normally get. The same thing I used to do, in Memphis in May barbeque contests. I did that for twenty-some years. In thinking of the country that we honored, say it was Jamaica. I used the barbeque sauce, pureed some mango, or whatever. But the aim to the sauce was to make it a little bit different. It gave it a little bit different flavor. Everybody

knows the barbeque sauce. You know, what you buy at the store. I like to experiment. I do not like, "Here's a recipe. Cook this for dinner tonight." I like to do it first for myself. Check it out and say, "Yes, it works. It comes out right. It actually tastes good, let's do it." If I've never cooked something, I want to try it out first. Before I do it for customers. I don't want to get nasty surprises.

Interviewer 1: Understandably. How about here with the menu? How does that work? I know you said before there was collaboration.

Roland: Adding something to the menu. Chimichurri sauce? I had never heard of that.

Interviewer 1: It's like Argentinian/Latin American. Yeah.

Roland: And, I'm not necessarily a fan of Mexican food. If I don't have to, I don't cook it. I'll just go and have a margarita.

[laughter]

Interviewer 1: I think that's what most people go for.

Roland: I just never got fond of the food. So, they asked for that sauce. I says, okay. First, I have to look up the internet for the [inaudible]. Then I got a friend of mine whose Mexican? I made up a little batch and gave it to him to try. I said, "Check that out." He says, "You need to add cumin to it." So I fixed up a big batch, added a little cumin to it, and those guys loved it.

Interviewer 2: What are they serving with that now?

Roland: Pork roast.

Interviewer 1: Interesting. I know it is with steak, but, okay.

Interviewer 2: I know that you told me one time that they added street tacos to the menu and you were like, "What is a street taco?"

[laughter]

Interviewer 1: So, you guys basically get to choose what you want. And they bring you suggestions. You adapt it and...

Roland: And of course, every time it's something new, I go and check and say, "This is what you wanted?" Then I get a "yes" or "no" or...

Interviewer 1: And then back to the drawing board.

Interviewer 2: It's normally pretty delicious. We get some good stuff.

Roland: Most of the time, people are happy. I haven't heard too many complaints.

Interviewer 1: Do you have specialties? Or your favorite things to make?

Roland: I had, I can't remember, it was 1990-something. I was asked to participate in a catfish competition. And I says, "I don't cook catfish. First, I'm Swiss. We don't have catfish in Switzerland." He says, "We've got that anything but fried catfish." Then I made the catfish bananas.

Interviewer 2: Those are delicious.

Interviewer 1: Catfish bananas.

Roland: Yep.

Interviewer 1: You'll have to explain what that is.

Roland: I won first prize!

Roland: In Memphis doing catfish bananas.

Interviewer 1: So, now you have to tell us, what are catfish bananas?

Roland: A catfish fillet, marinated in Worcestershire sauce, a little lemon juice and salt, pepper, dipped in flour, so both sides dipped in some powder. Cut up, slice up the banana. Put it in the same marinade you had the fish in. Then you take the marinated, the fish out, put it on a plate. The same plate you took the catfish out of the marinade, put the bananas in there. You add sweet powder to it, taking it up, take the tang a little bit out of it. Then you pour this over the catfish. Ta da!

Interviewer 2: Catfish bananas.

Interviewer 1: Catfish bananas. Wow. That is something that we need to introduce to the public.

Roland: I did this with the help of Locals, the restaurant in Oxford? We put this on the menu and 99% loved it. You always have that one that says no. The way I sold it was, "If you like bananas and you like catfish, I guarantee that you're going to like this dish. You cannot go wrong here."

Interviewer 1: Are people adventurous? Do you find that here, that people are willing to try new things?

Roland: If you, as a chef, go out to the table, you can sell the food a lot better. The wait staff has, on most occasions, no clue. You ask them, "How is this prepared?" "I don't know. Let me go and ask." A chef knows exactly how it is prepared and he can...he can make it sound fantastic. "Oh, he won first prize with catfish bananas. You've got to try that." That's not selling.

Interviewer 1: Right.

Roland: The way I explain it...

Interviewer 1: Yeah, it sounds amazing.

Roland: Some say it's like having bananas frosting over your catfish.

Interviewer 2: Yeah.

Interviewer 1: Somehow, the way you say it, you sautéed it in the butter, you sell it for sure.

Roland: Pretty much everything, you can sell it better that way if you know exactly how it is done.

Interviewer 2: Have you ever faced any challenges in your kitchen, like with staff or even sort of pushing the idea farther, discrimination as a foreigner?

Roland: Not necessarily discrimination. If you want to put it that way I'm [*inaudible – background noise*]. If you are doing your job, I'm a happy camper. If you're not doing your job, or if you're lazy and you don't want to work, you don't want to... or if you forget. If you can't remember tomorrow what I told you today. Okay, I'll tell you again. I may even show you again. But then the third day, you should get it. I don't care what color you are, what religion you are, if you're male or female, it doesn't bother me one bit. As long as you do your job.

Interviewer 2: Have you ever taken on an apprentice? In the same manner?

Roland: Yes. I've done that too. When I turned twenty-four, I opened up my first restaurant in Switzerland.

Interviewer 1: At twenty-four?

Roland: Yep. And actually that restaurant was the reason why I came here to the United States. You had a lot of English-speaking tourists. Nobody spoke English, including myself. But the waiters had so much fun to send me to the table to make a complete fool out of myself. Try to explain what meatloaf was, or that whatever items on the menu was. I finally got so tired of it, I says, "I'm going to have to learn English." Then my dad retired and he says, "I'm going to look after the restaurant. Why don't you go for a year." That's how I ended up over here, in the States. And after one year, I didn't learn enough English so I decided to make a second year out of it. The rest is history. Well, actually when the lease came back up in Switzerland for my restaurant, my dad called me and says, "I'm not going to sign on the dotted line with the exception you're coming back." And I told him, "Don't sign. I'm staying here."

Interviewer 1: Oh wow. What made you choose to stay?

Roland: Eh, I opened up a restaurant here.

Interviewer 1: [*laughter*] Ah! That's why. What was the first one you opened here? Was it Memphis?

Roland: In Germantown, yeah.

Interviewer 1: What was the name of it?

Roland: Country Squire.

Interviewer 2: You owned that for a long time.

Roland: Yeah, I had that for fourteen years.

Interviewer 1: Was it a Swiss restaurant?

Roland: No. But, I did do every so often, not necessarily Swiss. Specialties. [*pausing to think*] Oh, I had a weinerschnitzel.

Interviewer 1: Yeah, people know that. Spatzel, Schnitzel.

Roland: Yeah. Jaegerschnitzel. All kinds of stuff every so often. But, otherwise just, I called it a casual place for fine dining. I had tablecloths on the table, we did some [*inaudible – background noise*], bananas foster, cherries jubilee, crepe suzette. We did a lot on the table. We carved chateaubriand on the table. We carved rack of lamb at the table. So, a little bit upscale, but still casual. You just could have a fettuccine alfredo.

Interviewer 2: I know you've talked about that restaurant a lot.

Interviewer 1: A variation. And how many languages *do* you speak? I've got French, Swiss-German, German...

Roland: Just took a trip last year to Europe. I was in Italy and Paris, France. My French is [*chuckles*] almost gone. In thirty-five plus years, I haven't used it. So, can I have a conversation like we're having right now? No. Can I get the hotel room, something to eat, and ask for directions? Yes. With difficulties, but, yes, I still can do that. Italian is the same way. Can I get a hotel room, understand most of the menu? Yes. But, Italian, I never really spoke Italian. Just what you pick up, everything being so close. And then German and English, and a couple of words of Spanish. But, that's about it.

Interviewer 1: Were there any challenges when you first came to Memphis with language? And interacting with southerners, did you get a hard time?

Roland: I'll tell you a funny story. When I get here, and get off the airplane, the first thing I saw was "gift shop." Do you know what "gift" means in German? Poison. I said, "This is nuts, they have poison shops *in the airport!*"

Interviewer 2: Crazy Americans.

Interviewer 1: Yeah. Great first impression.

Roland: So, I didn't speak a word of English, so it was a challenge. My ex-wife spoke English so every time the phone rang, she had to answer it. And I remember, I came a little earlier than was actually planned, so I was a guest chef at the... [*pausing to think*]

Interviewer 2: Was it the Peabody?

Roland: No, the Memphis Country Club. I was a guest chef there. And I went to change my clothes and there was a guy there working, painting, and he was talking to me nonstop and I was going, "Mmmhmm. Yep."

Interviewer 1: Did you understand?

Roland: Nope!

[laughter]

Roland: And, I had some dishwashers talk to me and I think they were making fun of me, I'm not sure. So, I thought, "Okay, I can do that too." I'm going to say something in Swiss German. And I said [something] and he understood [*inaudible*], so I almost got beat up.

[laughter]

Roland: So yeah...there were some challenges.

Interviewer 2: Did you find that when you opened Country Squire, did you attract, sort of, other Swiss people. Was there sort of maybe a Swiss community because you ran the restaurant.

Roland: No, actually in Memphis, there are a few, but not that many. But a lot of them traveled to Europe, yeah? Especially up in Germantown. A lot of them have traveled. So, some of them say, "I had this in Germany, can you fix that?"

Roland: And if they pronounce it right, and if I can figure out what they are talking about, I would tell them, "Yes, I can do that," or "No, I cannot." That was the good part because I was flexible. So, "Sure I can fix that. The only thing is I need this ingredient. The next time you come in, I can have that ready for you."

Interviewer 1: Would that happen often? Or just sometimes if people had traveled.

Roland: Not on a regular basis, but every so often. I actually had a regular customer who ate everything I had on the menu and challenged me. Every time said, "Just fix me something." That's actually how that catfish bananas actually came in place. I had bananas and I had flounder fillet. So I said, "Oh shoot. Let me do the flounder bananas." And she took a bite from that dish? Asked for extra forks, and she took her plate from table to table and says, "You've got to try this. This is unbelievable." So, I actually put it on the menu. Flounder bananas.

Interviewer 1: Okay. Because of a customer.

Roland: And then they talked about the catfish contest and I says, "Okay, I did it with..." First, I did it in 1969 with Dover sole. Dover sole bananas. Forgot about it, then the flounder bananas, then I says, "Dover sole, flounder, why not catfish?"

Interviewer 1: And it worked, right? You said it tastes perfectly fine. Interesting, interesting. Creative. Did you have another question you'd like to ask? I have so many questions. Did you have any you wanted to ask first?

Interviewer 2: I really think we kind of covered most of this.

Interviewer 1: That you're interested in?

Interviewer 2: I guess just in terms of living in Oxford, or working in Oxford, what are some of your positive memories? What do you like about Oxford? What do you maybe not like about Oxford? Let's talk about that.

Roland: *[pauses]* Actually, there's not a lot I don't like. Oxford is a small, little town.

Roland: For businesses, you've got 20,000 students here from then till then. And then it dies. 20,000 disappear and two and a half months later, they come back. Then disappear again so...I don't know how many people actually live in Oxford. If you have 20,000 though, or whatever... Then you have 40,000 for a few months, then it's back to twenty. That's, I think, a huge challenge, if you want to put it a little negative. There's a lot of positives. I've met a lot of people. *[pauses]* And then you have some of the students they can get crazy. And party.

Interviewer 1: I can imagine.

Roland: But, you get people from Texas, from Louisiana. You get people from Chicago, California.

Interviewer 2: Tennessee.

Roland: Yeah. Everywhere, from everywhere. That's actually interesting. And, of course, a challenge to feed them.

Interviewer 1: A lot of different tastes, yeah. I can imagine.

Roland: Up north, they don't eat the grits here.

Interviewer 1: That's true. That's very, very true.

Roland: Yeah, I think there's a lot of positives. But also a challenge with that many cultures coming together. You've got people from everywhere in the world going to college here. So, it's interesting. I guess that's a positive, yeah?

Interviewer 1: MmmHm. Yeah. Did you mention that you had children?

Roland: Yes, I've got two sons.

Interviewer 1: What was it like for them growing up here in the South?

Roland: Terrible.

[laughter]

Interviewer 1: Do they consider themselves as southern? or Swiss? or how do they identify and kind of navigate?

Roland: One was born in Switzerland. He was eight months old when we came over here. And he first spoke Swiss German before English. The other one is actually a U.S. citizen. He was born here.

Roland: And eh, they both went to school here. We spoke Swiss German mostly, at the house. As the kids got a little bit older, we parents spoke Swiss German with them, and we got an English answer. So, we had funny little dialogues and if somebody would listen to it, they would turn crazy. Now, they both, they'll speak a little bit of Swiss German. Every so often, there's a word they don't know. So, if I talk to them and sometimes now, depending on what we're talking about, if it is business-like, then we do it in English. If it is more personal, we go sometimes into the Swiss German. And depending on what I'm saying, they look at me and, "What is that? What does that mean?" Then I try the English translation. "Oh, okay." But, both of them have been in Switzerland and can get around pretty good.

Interviewer 2: What are their names?

Roland: The older one is Thomas. The younger one is Mark.

Interviewer 1: So, they've been able to preserve some of that culture.

Roland: One lives in Memphis, the other one Oxford.

Interviewer 1: Oh wow, so they stayed. They stayed in the community. Did they go to Ole Miss?

Roland: Nope. Actually, the younger one, he lives here and he manages the car wash on Jackson. The U.S. Car Wash.

Interviewer 1: Oh fantastic. Business, business in the family.

Roland: Yep.

Interviewer 2: What about Thomas? What's Thomas do?

Roland: He is kitchen manager/chef at a Barbeque on Germantown Parkway.

Interviewer 1: Oh wow, so a chef in the family.

Roland: Actually, the younger one was cooking, too. He was on campus working at the Inn. And he finally says, "To heck with the restaurant business." I mean, I started them out early. Washing dishes, when I had my restaurant, they came and washed dishes. On the weekends and then one was making appetizers and prepping and whatever.

Interviewer 2: Very cool. There's a family connection to it, then. You've probably told me this a thousand times before, but I've always wondered what brought you here to this place? To Phi Delt? What brought you to the fraternity circuit to cook here?

Roland: I worked for six years with Aramark. And we started out with the Kappa...

Interviewer 2: Kappa sigs right here?

Roland: No, the one up the hill.

Interviewer 2: Kappa Alpha? Yeah, KA.

Roland: That was our first house. Then we picked up the Phi Delta. I was the residential dining director for Aramark. Chef of catering. I had all four frat houses for Aramark, the golf course.

Interviewer 1: Wow. Wow. And this was all under Aramark. You were working for them at that point.

Roland: Yes.

Interviewer 1: And running everything, basically.

Roland: Pretty much. Then they said, "You're doing too much." You couldn't spend enough time at each one, yeah? It was really too much. Then, they just gave me the frat houses. They said, "Don't worry about the rest of them. We've got that taken care of. They took one thing away...actually they made me interim catering director in between.

Interviewer 1: Wow. Okay.

Roland: Then they let me go. And I was, "Okay..." out of a job. Real hard to find a job. Yeah. Finally found one. It was the first time in my life that I hit the clock. I was always salaried. Even the apprenticeship, you get paid once a month. In Switzerland, most of them are salaried. [pauses] The first time I have to hit the clock at work as a cook. Then I learned that Delta house was unhappy with Aramark. And I knew Lenore's...

Interviewer 2: Mike?

Roland: Yeah.

Interviewer 2: Mike Patera.

Roland: Mike Patera.

Roland: And I started talking to him and he says, "Yeah. If it's up to me, it's yours." So, I started my own company and we took this one over. Then, I guess the other houses Aramark had, they were unhappy.

Interviewer 2: So now you've got them all.

Roland: I got them all.

Interviewer 1: Do you? So how many houses do you have?

Roland: Right now, four.

Interviewer 1: Oh wow, okay. And what's the name of your company?

Roland: College Hill Catering.

Interviewer 1: College Hill Catering. Okay. How long have you been in business under...

Interviewer 2: I've got a couple of those bad boys [*hands something to interviewer 1? Business card, maybe?*].

Interviewer 2: Thank you. Perfect.

Roland: When was it we started with that, a couple of years ago?

Interviewer 2: Was it 2013?

Roland: Something like that.

Interviewer 2: Because you've been here as long as I've been here. Right? I think so.

Roland: First year or two, I helped out Locals because we couldn't make enough money here, one house, to pay all the bills, so I had my partner here, who went through the same problem. He's a couple of years younger than I am and he couldn't find a job any more. So, we started the company, he stopped working here and I kept my other job, if you want to put it that way. We actually ran it through our business as well. We called it, I was the consulting chef. Then I said, "Well, we ran into a problem here," and I says, "so let's quit the other job. This will be my bread and butter. I have to take care of it."

Interviewer 2: Right. I remember that.

Roland: And they came to me and says, "He's got to go."

Interviewer 2: Do you want to cut for any of this?

Roland: Yeah.]

Roland: Right before I came to the United States, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip came to Switzerland on an official state visit. They took the same trip her mother did forty, fifty years before. They went to the place where Switzerland was founded. [*inaudible-background music*] I worked at the place that took care of the food there. From the chefs all who worked there, I was selected to be the chef for the queen and Prince Phillip. Are you a classic music fan? Have you heard of Herbert von Karajan?

Interviewer 1: No, I haven't.

Roland: Herbert von Karajan was one of the greatest conductors of symphonies. I cooked for him. In Switzerland, we had the National Music Festival.

Interviewer 1: You're a celebrity chef! And a Royal chef! That's pretty impressive.

Roland: On campus, when we had the presidential debate, Obama, McCain, we took care of that and the senators.

Interviewer 1: Wow. Did you know this?

Roland: Then General Colin Powell came by on campus, I took care of the luncheon there. Condoleezza Rice came on campus. I took care of that.

Interviewer 1: Aren't you lucky? Wow.

Roland: I was invited to cook at the James Beard house in New York. This is for the chef, like a movie star being nominated for an Oscar. Not necessarily win, but you were nominated.

Interviewer 1: That's huge, huge!

Roland: I think there were only four other chefs in the whole state of Mississippi who have ever gone to the James Beard house. I got a medal from the chefs association from the Presidential medallion. From the chefs association, national chefs association...

Interviewer 2: What year was that and where did that take place?

Roland: That was, where the hell was it? Was that in Vegas?

[laughter]

Roland: I would have to go back.

Interviewer 1: Too many awards to keep track of.

Roland: At home, I've got medals hanging and I've got awards, whatever.

Interviewer 2: You're pretty decent at cooking, I mean, you can hold your own.

Interviewer 1: You think? Understatement *[laughing]*. Wow.

Roland: I did the seafood competition in Memphis. The one that won...

Interviewer 1: The one with the catfish *[bananas]*...Oh, no, that was a different one.

Roland: Then I had to go to Nashville for the state competition. Mystery box, I came in second. Missed it by that much. The winner went to the national competition. That year, when that happened, it was in New Orleans.

Interviewer 1: I'm impressed. I am impressed. He failed to mention all of these other details.

Roland: Normally, I don't make that big of a deal.

Interviewer 1: It's a huge deal.

Roland: With the exception it helps my business. I try to mention that.

Interviewer 1: Of course.

Roland: Otherwise, as you get older, you're not interested in competition anymore. Been there, done that. I had my own radio show in Memphis for a short period of time.

[brief interruption by someone who needed to get his keys]

Roland: I have been on TV. I did some cooking on channel three during the news. Just a few times.

Interviewer 1: And your radio show? What was the show about?

Roland: My cooking. I can't remember, it's too long ago. And it didn't last that long. We didn't have enough callers, so it was cancelled.

Interviewer 1: But you did it. Had a radio show.

Interviewer 2: What was it called, like *The Roland Schneider Hour* or something?

Roland: To be honest, I don't remember. It was such a brief thing. I used to do my own commercials on the radio. Because of my accent.

Interviewer 1: Oh *because* of your accent. Ah, tell us about that.

Roland: I went to the radio station and wanted them to actually do a commercial and as we were talking, they says, "You know, *you* need to do the talking."

Roland: "You'll get more attention because you sound different." If you're driving and listening and you hear a normal, regular, American voice to go and eat there, that's one thing, but if somebody talks funny [*laughter*], then it gets their attention. So, it made sense, so I started doing a lot of my radio commercials myself. Or a little interview-type commercials. They would ask questions and I would answer them or whatever. I did a TV commercial for my restaurant.

Interviewer 1: Do you still have the footage somewhere saved?

Roland: Probably, yeah. [*Inaudible*] magazine, the newspaper. You know, not too long ago, somebody said to me, "You know, your recipe got published again." Somebody was asking for hot bacon salad dressing. They looked it up in the archive and found mine, what I gave them twenty years ago. They said that they had one from Roland Schnider from the Country Squire restaurant and here is the recipe. A lot of times during that time, I was interviewed for certain things. The newspaper called up and said, "What about this? or whatever." To put my two cents into it.

Interviewer 1: That's wonderful.

Roland: So yeah, I've had a full life [*chuckles*].

Interviewer 1: A very successful one.

Interviewer 2: How old are you now?

Roland: Sixty-four.

Interviewer 1: Sixty-four. Other questions? Is there anything I've missed?

Interviewer 2: I just want to know, overall, you said you feel at home in Mississippi? Do you consider this home?

Roland: Yes.

Interviewer 2: I don't want to say that there's a disconnect between you and Switzerland.

Roland: Whenever I go to Switzerland on vacation, I don't know if every person has that. You're glad, but the week or two weeks are up and you're ready to go home.

Interviewer 1: Ready to go home? Oh, you feel that when you're there. Okay. Wow.

Roland: When I go to Switzerland now, I'm looking at it differently than I did when I was living there. First, I got my camera. I feel like a real tourist. The fun part is things that I have been walking by for twenty years, on an almost daily basis, that I didn't pay attention to. Now I say, look at that! I never knew that this was here. Then I have to take a picture of it.

Interviewer 1: You appreciate it now. That's funny.

Roland: It's like people in Memphis who have never gone to Graceland. Or never went to Beale Street. But, have been living all their lives in Memphis. Sometimes when I go to Switzerland, I feel the same way. I just look at it differently.

Roland: You look at things differently now than you what you did then. But, no the states are.

Interviewer 1: Home? This is home?

Roland: Yeah, it came to mind as I get older, maybe in four years, maybe five years should I retire, should I go back? But, it's so true, whenever I go back, it's great, and I still have a few friends there, yeah, besides family. But, I don't know if I could, yeah? I don't know if I could.

Interviewer 1: So, the South is home, perhaps? And they haven't lost you to New York or California, or any of these major culinary hubs?

Roland: A lot people have said, "You know, if you had your restaurant in Atlanta, or in New York, or in California, I guarantee you, you would have a three-months' wait for people to come in." I don't know.

Interviewer 2: He loves us too much.

Roland: People are friendly. You most always have exceptions, but most people are friendly, helpful. Even if they don't know how to drive. Actually, a blinker is to tell other people which way you're going. Most people, it's like a suggestive piece of equipment on the car. Not one that you should use. I don't understand. Even with some negative things, people are friendly, nice. There's nothing I could complain about.

Interviewer 1: Okay, okay. Wonderful.

Interviewer 2: That's really all I had.

Interviewer 1: Yeah, that concludes my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add? That we should know, or that you didn't get a chance to touch on in detail about cooking, or food, or the business? Or your businesses, I should say. You've had so many.

Roland: Business-wise, if you have any contacts through sororities, I would love to pick up a sorority house.

Interviewer 1: So, it's only fraternities you have?

Roland: Right now.

Interviewer 1: It's only the guys.

Roland: Or even other fraternity houses. The hard part is finding the right person to talk to. The president, he's president right now. Two or three months from now, he's not the president. He doesn't care.

Interviewer 1: Right.

Roland: So he's, "Okay, I'll talk to you for ten minutes." I'm looking for people I can talk to who can explain what they're doing. Will I get every single house? No. But, I'm pretty sure we could have quite a few other houses. Save money.

Interviewer 1: Cut costs.

Roland: And I don't know if you want to say that or not, do you want more money to party?

Interviewer 1: *[laughing]* That's probably what most people are concerned about.

Roland: Or buy t-shirts or whatever, so everyone has that momentum? Or, I don't know how it works, to pay the house off? Or take a trip, or whatever those guys all want to do. I don't care what they do with the extra money, but I want to be able to go in, talk to the right person. I went in to the Sigma Mus and talked to the house mothers and they said, "Oh you need to talk to the president." So, two days later...

Interviewer 2: Taylor?

Roland: Taylor, yeah. So, two days later, I walked into the front door, asked if the president was there. He just happened to be there. I said, "I would like to set up an appointment so I can talk to you about our program." Gave him my business card. He said, "Yeah, okay. We're going on spring break now." I said, "Yeah, just call me when you get back." Never heard anything from him. Oh, first thing he said, "Oh, you need to talk to the house mother. She's in charge of the kitchen." Another house I walked in to and asked for the president. He said, "Yeah, we are looking for a foodservice company and let's see when we can get together. I'm going to give you a call." So, I think his treasurer called me. I was finally able to get together with him and told him about my program. And I haven't heard back from him. I texted him about five or six times, I even texted him, "If you went with another company, that's okay, no problem. Keep us plan B, in mind," yeah? I haven't heard a peep back from him.

Interviewer 2: What fraternity.

Roland: That's the Beta house. So, it's really hard to...Okay, who makes the decisions? The house

Interviewer 2: Nationals?

Roland: Nationals, yeah. Do they all have a say-so? But who do I talk to here? To at least give me a chance to say, "This is what we do. This is our menu we're doing for this house, this house." I mean, it's not a secret, but we're cooking. And depending on your budget, you may get more [*inaudible*] and wrappings of rice. Where the other ones make it steak once a month, or whatever. But, give me a chance to talk with you guys.

Interviewer 1: So, getting that entry into the door.

Roland: At one house, you have two cooks who are feeding fifty people for lunch and seventy people for dinner. You don't need two cooks for that. One cook should be able to handle it. I've got one cook feeding eighty to a hundred people for dinner and sixty to eight for lunch and they have one cook there. So, just like this, I can save them six hundred fifty dollars per week.

Interviewer 1: That's significant.

Roland: Plus the two [*inaudible*] as well. I probably can save them almost a thousand dollars per week. So, fifty weeks, that's \$50,000.

Interviewer 1: That's a whole lot significant. Have you ever talked to the Southern Foodways Alliance here on campus? Have you ever been interviewed or featured by them at all?

Roland: No, when I worked for Aramark, we had some food students and they remodeled something and we had some working for us. They had to do like an internship or whatever?

Interviewer 1: But, you haven't been featured, or had stories written about you or anything like that? Would you be interested?

Roland: Yeah.

Interviewer 1: This class is part of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, but we also have as part of it, the Southern Foodways Alliance and it's all about celebrating food, chefs, cooks.

Roland: If it gets me the exposure...

Interviewer 1: Yes, that's why I'm wondering. It's on a website and it would be public, so I mean, photos and information.

Roland: All the things we talked about, I have nothing to hide.

Interviewer 1: Okay, well if you're willing, and certainly if you'd like to work with me on that. You know, get some recognition for this wonderful food being done. We'll just ask for some of those photos and we can do that. It doesn't have to be now.