

## Savoy Restaurant

Maxine Kelamis and her son, Bill, tell a story of immigration, food, and the American dream.

### Chapter 01 - 0:54

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** Nick Kelamis is where the story of the Savoy Cafe begins. Nick left Greece to build a better life for his family in America in 1910. His work on the railroad brought him to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he would make his home.

Through various jobs he was able to save enough money to open the Kelamis Café at 208 S. Boston in 1925. Eventually, Nick's son, Tommy, left Greece to join his father in the business. It was there that Tommy befriended a young waitress named Maxine Rawlings, and after a courtship, they were married in 1941.

Their family restaurant was opened in downtown Tulsa in 1954, but urban renewal forced the Savoy Restaurant to relocate and re-open in 1975 at the current location, 6033 S. Sheridan.

Why did Nick Kelamis name the restaurant Savoy?

Listen for the answer in this oral history interview on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

### Chapter 02 - 5:18

#### Greece

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is July 21, 2016. Maxine, would you state your full name?

**Maxine Kelamis:** Maxine Marie Kelamis.

**JE:** Your date of birth?

**MK:** February 21, 1923.

**JE:** That's—

**MK:** I'm ninety-three.

**JE:** There's a certain point where we're not supposed to ask women their age.

**MK:** Well, after you get this old, it doesn't matter.

**JE:** Tell us where we're recording this interview.

**MK:** We're recording at the Savoy Restaurant at 61st and Sheridan, 6033 S. Sheridan.

**JE:** Joining us is your son Bill. And Bill, if you don't mind stating your date of birth and your present age.

**Bill Kelamis:** April 29, 1950, which is sixty-six years.

**JE:** And you have worked in this business since you were five years old?

**BK:** Almost. Thirteen years old. I've worked pretty consistently since I was thirteen. There was a time when I was about six years old and I thought I needed to go down to the restaurant with my parents in the morning. And I did for one summer. That's where I really wet my feet.

**JE:** When you were six years old?

**BK:** Six years old. I peeled potatoes all day long. I do not like peeling potatoes, to this day.

**JE:** Is that something that you wanted him to do or he just was interested in doing it?

**MK:** We just put everybody to work, everybody had things to do.

**JE:** Okay. So the child labor laws didn't get you for a six-year-old?

**MK:** No. No. I guess they didn't know about it.

**JE:** Does Bill have brothers or sisters?

**MK:** He had one brother and three sisters.

**JE:** Maxine, where were you born?

**MK:** Right here in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I've lived here all my life.

**JE:** At what hospital?

**MK:** At home.

**JE:** You were born at home?

**MK:** Back then they didn't go to the hospital—

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** ...very often.

**JE:** Do you remember the address where it was?

**MK:** It was on North Detroit. The eleven hundred block on North Detroit.

**JE:** Your mother's name?

**MK:** Pearl Rawlings.

**JE:** Pearl Rawlings?

**MK:** R-a-w-l-i-n-g-s.

**JE:** She came here from another part of the country?

**MK:** You know, I didn't know much about my family history. My dad came from Missouri, I know his folks were from Missouri.

**JE:** And what was his name?

**MK:** Fred Rawlings. And they lived in Broken Arrow. I know one summer I went down there to work, to take care of them because they were sick. That did me in for working on the farm. I didn't like that. You had—

**JE:** How old were you when you did that?

**MK:** I was sixteen. I had worked one year and they got sick, and so they needed me to come down and take care of them. I took care of them that summer, but I was glad when I finished because—

**JE:** Yes?

**MK:** I didn't like cooking on a woodstove.

**JE:** And then you ended up in the restaurant business. How about that?

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** Let's talk then about how your family does come to Oklahoma. The story I think begins with Nick Kelamis.

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** Is that true?

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Can you talk to us about that journey that he made?

**MK:** Well, he came over first. He was going to come and make money. He had a wife and my husband, which was about a year old. He came over here to make money.

**JE:** From where?

**MK:** From Greece.

**JE:** Do you remember what year that was?

**MK:** Um, Nick came to America in nineteen and ten.

**JE:** You said that he had left his wife behind in Greece?

**MK:** Yes. Before he could make enough money to bring her over here they said she grieved herself to death. And Tommy was four years old when she died. So that was about three years.

Of course, it took time to make money to bring people over.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**MK:** And he never did get to bring her over.

**JE:** So then, Tommy lived there in Greece for some time?

**MK:** His grandmother and his uncle raised him in Greece. At that time, the men had to serve a year in the army when they turned eighteen. So when he turned eighteen, he had to serve that year before he could come over here.

**JE:** From Greece?

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** Nick, what did he do then, here in the United States?

**BK:** He worked on the railroad—

**MK:** At first—

**BK:** ...for—

**MK:** ...until he come to Tulsa. And then when he came to Tulsa, he opened a restaurant down by the depot. When the old depot was downtown.

**BK:** Nick opened the Frisco Restaurant at 16 South Boston. He went into partnership with another Greek man. And they worked there—we thought in 1925, we have reason to believe and it hasn't been verified yet that it was 1920 when that happened.

His partner was killed in a robbery one night at the restaurant and after that Nick just wanted to change—we assume—he wanted to change places. He got another restaurant a couple of blocks down on South Boston.

**JE:** So that was a restaurant that he had started?

**BK:** Yeah, in 1920.

**JE:** He brought Tommy here...?

**MK:** Nineteen twenty-eight.

**JE:** Tommy, then, is working as a dishwasher in Kelamis Café?

**MK:** His—

**BK:** His dad told him he had to work until he could speak English.

**MK:** He learned fast. They had a special tutor because he didn't like washing dishes.

**JE:** He didn't like washing dishes?

**BK:** That's right.

**JE:** He just learned by listening to people in the restaurant, I guess?

**BK:** In fact, he did, but there was a gentlemen, the printer, a guy that owned a printing company that came and tutored him at night.

**MK:** Well, now, he learned fast because he said he didn't like washing dishes. And Nick was pretty strict. That's where I started working.

**JE:** Were there other Greeks living in Tulsa?

**BK:** Yes.

**JE:** Before they came?

**BK:** Yes.

**JE:** So there was a community here?

**BK:** There was a Greek community here.

**JE:** Is that what probably drew Nick to Tulsa?

**BK:** I don't know. There was a Greek community, it's over where the Greek church is, in that area right now.

**JE:** So you, then, are part Greek?

**BK:** Fifty percent, yes.

**JE:** Fifty percent Greek, right?

**Chapter 03 - 4:43****Maxine Is a Waitress**

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**John Erling:** You worked as a waitress in the Kelamis Café?

**Maxine Kelamis:** Right. During the summer, after I was out of school, and I said, “Well, I wanted to work for the summer.” We lived down at, I think it was Midland Valley. I know I had to walk a mile almost to get up to the bus station. We lived there for about a couple of years.

And there was a train that came through, not with people on it, but with—

**Bill Kelamis:** Freight cars.

**MK:** Yes. And they’d have three or four working people. So they would come through and they would want to eat.

So what happened, my dad worked at the ice company at that time, but he’d get up at night and fix them mostly breakfast, eggs, bacon, something that you could cook fast. Sometimes my stepmother would either make a pot of beans or a pot of stew and if they wanted that they could have that.

But he’d wake me up about an hour before the train came in. I’d go to bed kind of early because I had to go to school too, because I was still going to school. So he’d wake me up about an hour before the train came, to get up and wait on them. That’s how I learned to wait on people, just waiting on those train people.

**BK:** And they had a home there, they lived in the back of the home.

**MK:** It was just a little house.

**BK:** And they just had a little—

**MK:** They just had a room for the restaurant and the rest of it was where we lived. It wasn’t very big.

**BK:** So it really wasn’t a restaurant, as such. It was just a little place for the engineer—

**JE:** Yeah.

**BK:** ...and the people on the train to come in.

**JE:** And maybe your father made some extra money.

**MK:** Yeah, they charged them a little bit, but I don’t get any money from it. [time 1:20]

**JE:** No, it’s like you’re on your feet.

Did you go to Tulsa Central?

**MK:** I did. I’d just get the bus and go from out there even and go downtown to go to Central.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** And I went to Roosevelt Junior High.

**JE:** Elementary, where did you—

**MK:** Emerson.

**JE:** What year did you graduate from Central?

**MK:** 'Forty-one.

**JE:** Nineteen forty-one. Do you remember at that time other restaurants or businesses that were around in Tulsa, downtown Tulsa?

**MK:** Oh, I remember Brown Duncan, because we shopped at Brown Duncan a lot.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** And there was Lerner's. There was Fields, that was a good place to shop, ladies' shop. Wolf Brothers was good for men's, we'd shop there.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** It's sure different now.

**JE:** Yes. Yes it is. Then how did you get hired at Kelamis Café?

**MK:** Well, I just walked by and there happened to be one waitress they had. She saw me going by and she came out and hollered at me because she was a neighbor of mine. And her name was also Maxine. She said, "We need a waitress." She said, "Why don't you come and work this summer?"

And I said, "Well, I have to go to school in the fall. Just for the summer, I'll work."

So he hired me right then.

**JE:** So you were seventeen, eighteen years old?

**MK:** I was fifteen.

**JE:** Oh, fifteen?

**MK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Okay.

**MK:** First thing I had to do was go down and get a social security card. They had just started social security, and I had to go sign up for that. But I had to tell them I was sixteen. You're not supposed to work until you're sixteen, so I had to tell them I was sixteen.

**JE:** We won't tell anybody you did that. So you're fifteen years old, working. And then?

**MK:** My shift was three to eleven at night. You worked seven days a week.

**JE:** Wow.

**MK:** And you got three dollars a week and your tips.

**JE:** I thought you were going to say a day. Three dollars a week, plus tips. And what would tips be?

**MK:** A nickel, a dime, and quarter.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** We had quite a few gamblers that came in there, really nice people, but, you know, they gambled. If they made good they tipped me good. If they didn't make anything I didn't get anything either. But that was okay.

**JE:** What kind of gambling then went on? Whatever?

**MK:** I think they just played cards among themselves, that's what it was.

**JE:** So then you're working there until?

**MK:** Well, I worked until school started, and then I quit. I had told them I'd just work for the summer.

**JE:** Right.

**MK:** So when school started in September, I quit. And we were downtown shopping, because I wanted to buy some dresses and things for school, my stepmother and myself. We had finished shopping and were waiting for the bus, and Tommy, which was the owner's son—

**JE:** Yep.

**MK:** ...came by and he said, "Why don't you come back to work?"

And I said, "Oh, I can't, I'm going to finish school first."

So my stepmother spoke up and said, "She can come back."

And I said, "Well, I don't get out of school till three thirty."

He said, "That doesn't make any difference."

My shift was supposed to be three to ten.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** He said, "You can just come when you get free. When the school's out, whatever time you get here. If it's four o'clock or whatever, you just come then and work your shift, that's okay."

So I said, "Well, I can do that." So I did.

**JE:** So did you work until ten o'clock at night?

**MK:** Every night.

**JE:** And then you got up and went to school at eight o'clock in the morning?

**MK:** About seven o'clock.

**JE:** Seven o'clock in the morning.

**MK:** Yeah.

**JE:** And you did that for?

**MK:** Well, until I graduated in '41.

## Chapter 04 - 2:55

### Maxine and Tommy

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**John Erling:** Tommy, who is the son of Nick who owns the restaurant, spotted you there. Do you think probably he had his eye on you when he spotted you there?

**Maxine Kelamis:** Uh, well, at first I thought he was so gripey. I know the other girl had told me, she said, "I don't want you to like Tommy because I like him."

And I said, "I don't like him." He was gripey as he could be. Especially until he had his coffee. You see, he worked the evening shift.

**JE:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**MK:** He worked the same shift I did. His dad was really nice and not hard on you. And they would not tell you anything except once. If they told you once what to do, you'd better do it. And you'd better remember it because they weren't going to tell you a second time.

**JE:** Um-hmm (thoughtful affirmative).

**MK:** They had one of those can openers that work on the side of your table.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** And somebody wants a can of peaches. Well, the customer had to tell me where to go get the peaches and to open them up and bring them to him. But I couldn't figure out how to work that can opener. And then he sat there watching me, talking to his friend. But he wouldn't help me.

Finally, I said, "I can't do this, you're going to have to show me how to work this can opener."

Well, he showed me once and then after that, that was all. And how to make coffee, you were shown one time. We had those big urns. They only told you one time.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** They didn't tell you the second time, you'd better listen.

**JE:** What kind of a personality was Nick? Was he outgoing?

**MK:** And easy, easy-going, very, very nice guy. He died young. He died at fifty-eight.

**JE:** And what did he die of?

**MK:** Cancer.

**JE:** Tommy, then, you just didn't really get along with Tommy at first?

**MK:** At—I thought he was gripey.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** Let's see, I guess it was Christmas, when I was sixteen. He had my Christmas gift but he didn't want to give it to me at the restaurant. He asked if I'd meet him at the Orpheum Theater before I went to work. He didn't even go in. He just gave me my gift and left.

And I went in and watched the movie. It was a watch and a necklace.

**JE:** Oh?

**MK:** And that was kind of the beginning of when we started—

**JE:** Dating then?

**MK:** ...about sixteen.

**JE:** You graduated in '41.

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** You were eventually married then, weren't you?

**MK:** Yes.



**JE:** You were married then in 1941. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941?

**MK:** Definitely I do. We were working and at noon they came down to the restaurant and told me about it. That's how I found out about it.

**JE:** The war did affect your life because Tommy, your husband—

**MK:** He went into service.

**JE:** He was drafted.

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** In the army.

**MK:** And Christine was two or three when he was drafted.

**JE:** Christine is your first?

**MK:** First child, yes.

**JE:** Right. So when your husband goes into the army you stayed here?

**MK:** I stayed here in Tulsa. I moved back home with my dad and stepmom and paid them rent there. I stayed there and did the cooking and the cleaning and everything.

## Chapter 05 - 2:10

### The Sign-Savoy

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**John Erling:** After his service in the military, he comes back to Tulsa. Is that when he opens the pool hall?

**Maxine Kelamis:** The pool hall, some Greek fellows owned it. But they were wanting to sell, so he bought it with two other partners. He didn't stay there long.

He never let me go in there at all. If we wanted to see him I'd take the kids and we'd stay outside and he'd come out and talk to us. He didn't want us in the pool hall.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**MK:** And he didn't get along with his partners, so he didn't stay there long.

Then, he and a friend, that's when they went to Texas, looking for a restaurant. And they were ready to move down there.

And I said, "No, I don't want to move down there. I like Tulsa."

So we stayed in Tulsa.

**JE:** Well, that was a key moment for your family.

**Bill Kelamis:** Yeah, um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** You said no to that. And then—

**MK:** So we stayed here.

**JE:** Then, that's when you opened a restaurant here?

**MK:** After he came back from the service.

**JE:** Came back.

**MK:** He found the Tulsa Steakhouse, it was at 3rd and Detroit. It was named Tulsa Steakhouse at the time.

**JE:** Okay.

**MK:** So when he went down to have a sign made, he was going to put “Kelamis Restaurant” up because it had always been a Kelamis Café, you know?

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** And that fellow told him, he said, “I’ve got a sign that somebody ordered and didn’t pick it up. We’ll sell it to you real cheap.”

So he said, “Well, okay, I’ll take it.” Just because it was cheap.

**JE:** Right.

**MK:** And he said, “They’ll come.” He felt like they’d come for the food, not for the name of the sign, anyway.

**JE:** Sure. And it was a sign that was never claimed by a customer that was made.

**BK:** Right.

**MK:** Yes. That was the Savoy sign. We kept it for years. We were going to put it up here but it was too heavy. By that time, they wouldn’t let you hang that heavy sign. So we never did get to use it.

**BK:** We did downtown. The Savoy sign was hanging on the corner of the building downtown.

**MK:** It was neon and it was heavy.

**BK:** When we moved out here, the sign had been taken down and stored at the house. I always wanted to refurbish it but I decided, you know, you have an eight foot long sign and three feet high, what are you going to do with that?

**JE:** Do you know whatever happened to that sign?

**BK:** I just finally told the sign guy, I said, “Just junk it.”

**MK:** We saved that for years.

**JE:** Well, thus the Savoy Restaurant was born, then, wasn’t it?

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And again, that location was?

**BK:** 230 East 3rd, corner of 3rd and Detroit.

**Chapter 06 - 4:37****Savoy Downtown**

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**John Erling:** Do you remember other restaurants at the time in that area?

**Maxine Kelamis:** Yes, there was—

**JE:** They would be your competitors.

**MK:** ...there was a Chinese place up in the next block. And then Louis Pope's—

**Bill Kelamis:** Mary's Restaurant.

**MK:** Mary's Restaurant was around the corner from us. There was one—

**BK:** Jim's Coney Island.

**MK:** Jim's Coney Island.

**BK:** Was down there.

**MK:** And then down the street was—

**BK:** Bell's.

**MK:** ...Bell's Family Restaurant.

**JE:** Umm (thoughtful sound).

**MK:** It was all you could eat down there for a pretty cheap price. But we never wanted for customers. And then across the street was the White Castle, and I think Win's finally bought it out and put it down on 3rd, but they didn't last very long either. I know they had a birthday party every day.

**JE:** So in 1954, the restaurant is open. I went back, the Tulsa mayor at the time was L. C. Clark.

**MK:** Okay.

**JE:** Then came along George Norvell, and then James Maxwell.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Mayors of the town. And Bill—

**MK:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** ...you would remember that because you lived back then.

Let's talk about your menu. What was on your menu at that time?

**MK:** Pretty much the same thing it is now. We've never changed the menu very much. In fact, we didn't have recipes or anything, we just kind of knew from watching.

I couldn't cook when I started working at fourteen, fifteen, but I just watched how they did it. And it wasn't long and they were leaving me there by myself in the afternoon for a couple of hours to cook steaks and things on the grill. And I just learned by watching. And the kids learned by watching us cook. It's just not recipes, really.

**JE:** Right.

**MK:** It's—

**JE:** Cinnamon rolls have been a mainstay.

**MK:** That's Bill's completely.

**JE:** Okay. You didn't have cinnamon rolls back then?

**MK:** I had absolutely nothing to do with the cinnamon rolls.

**JE:** Oh? But you did biscuits and gravy back then, didn't you?

**MK:** Oh yes. Now, that recipe was what we used at home all the time. And that first day that we were here we were so busy we kept running out of everything. We run out of biscuits and gra—I told Bill what to put in them back then. I could remember all the ingredients, you know, by memory.

He started making them and I've never made a one since. He does a better job than I can do.

**JE:** This is in '54. Somebody came in to buy a breakfast. How much do you think it would have cost them?

**BK:** Sixty-five cents. Well, less than that. When I was thirteen, which would have been '63, ham and eggs, hash browns, and toast was seventy-five cents. Ham and one egg was sixty-five. You know, hamburger was thirty-five cents.

**MK:** And you could eat a good steak, I mean, we cut our own meat and it was good, very good steaks, T-bones and club steaks and beef tenderloins. And they were less than two dollars. They were really cheap.

**BK:** The large T-bone, which was a fourteen-ounce T-bone, was \$1.75. A dollar ten for a sirloin steak, eight-ounce sirloin, and the fillet was \$1.70, I think, yeah.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**BK:** When I went to work—

**MK:** He can remember those prices better than I do.

**BK:** ...so in '54, it would have been much cheaper.

**MK:** We had meal tickets back then. They bought those five dollar meal tickets. The older people, their family a lot of times would buy that for them.

**JE:** How did that work? A five dollar meal ticket?

**MK:** When they ate, well, we'd just punch it out.

**JE:** Oh.

**MK:** Because a lot of them were winos and they wasted their money.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** And their family would buy the meal ticket so they'd have something to eat.

**JE:** Were you open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?

**MK:** Yes. We'd get up and get down there about five o'clock and be open until about two o'clock. Just close up long enough just to mop and clean up.

**JE:** When did you close?

**BK:** After the bar rush.

**JE:** Oh, in the morning?

**BK:** Yeah. The bars closed at midnight, so we were open until one, I guess.

**MK:** One or two.

**BK:** One o'clock.

**MK:** One or two.

**JE:** What time did you start in the morning?

**MK:** We started at five.

**JE:** You did? Okay, then how long did you work during the day?

**MK:** Until two.

**BK:** Her father was partners and he came to work at two in the afternoon, and he ran the night shift.

**JE:** Okay. So you worked until two o'clock in the afternoon, but the restaurant stayed open until one or two in the morning?

**BK:** Yes.

**MK:** Uh-huh (affirmative). But that was seven days a week. We worked.

**JE:** Didn't you get tired of that?

**MK:** That's all I knew, I guess. I just got up and went and never thought about it.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** Back then you worked hard, never thought.

I know one night, it was about midnight and I was waxing the floors. And Tommy said, "You've got to get up at four o'clock to go to work in the morning."

I said, "I'll be up." And I was. But, you know, it didn't bother me back when I was young. I had a lot of energy.

**JE:** But Tommy was a hard worker too?

**MK:** Oh, he worked long hours and hard too.

**JE:** So the two of you were quite a team, weren't you?

**MK:** Yeah. He'd come home and go out in the yard and work in the yard.

**JE:** He finished at two o'clock and then probably came home and worked in the yard.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** Yeah, we both came home at the same time, usually.

**JE:** Right.

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**Chapter 07 - 1:45**  
**Savoy Moves South**

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**John Erling:** That was in 1973. So then, what goes on for the next couple of years? You don't have a restaurant.

**Bill Kelamis:** Nope.

**Maxine Kelamis:** Well, I'm tired.

**JE:** Okay, you're resting.

**MK:** I decided I needed a rest, a year or so. We were kind of looking, in the meantime, for a location.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** But we just didn't find what we wanted.

**JE:** So, Bill, what were you doing in those two years?

**BK:** I was working for a meat company.

**JE:** The one that you referred to?

**BK:** H. and R. Meat Company.

**JE:** Okay.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative). I was working there those two years. We'd looked occasionally, we'd seen this place probably a year before we—we came down and looked at it and—

**MK:** It was a, it was a mess. It was so dirty and awful. I said, "Eew."

**BK:** ...it was dirty and so we said no. But then we decided to come back and looked again in '75, and decided, "Well, it has potential."

**MK:** We liked the location.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** But we didn't like the way that they took care of it.

**JE:** So—

**MK:** But they had a good business.

**JE:** You mean, the shopping center?

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Had a good business?

**BK:** And the restaurant.

**MK:** The restaurant had a lot of the builders.

**BK:** They had a pretty good business.

**JE:** Oh, this was a restaurant?

**BK:** It was, that middle room. The middle room is what we bought.

**JE:** Okay.

**BK:** In '75.

**JE:** And what was the name of the restaurant?

**BK:** Jerry's Restaurant.

**JE:** Well, what was it like around here? Was this considered far South?

**MK:** It was far South.

**BK:** Yes.

**MK:** But we just thought it was a good location and kind of what we wanted. And it's worked out.

**JE:** You re-opened the doors in '75, here at 6033 South Sheridan. So when you opened the doors, did you have immediate success? Immediate business?

**MK:** Yes, from the very first day. A lot of the customers from downtown—

**JE:** They followed you out here?

**MK:** They followed us.

**JE:** And that was quite a ways to be going—

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** ...probably at that time.

**BK:** It was. First day we were packed all day.

**JE:** And of course, Bill, you were there to make that happen. Because you had committed yourself to the restaurant business?

**BK:** Oh yes. Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** And he had learned to make those cinnamon rolls.

## Chapter 08 - 3:37

### Cinnamon Rolls

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**John Erling:** So let's bring in the topic of cinnamon rolls. This is your idea, is that true?

**Bill Kelamis:** That was my idea.

**JE:** Okay, and you learned to make them in school?

**BK:** I tried to make bread in school. I'd go buy the recipes and I'd get thermometers and check the temperature of water. I couldn't make a loaf of bread to save my soul.

**Maxine Kelamis:** Well, I've never been good at the bread—

**BK:** And I decided people who write bread recipes are not telling you all the things.

So when we got here, I always remembered the school's cinnamon rolls and I said, "I want to make cinnamon rolls, I want to make breads and things like that." So I just bought several pounds of yeast and I said, "I'm going to just start making it."

And so I put together what I thought would work. They came out pretty good. And I tweaked it a little bit the next couple of days, and that's basically the cinnamon roll recipe today.

**MK:** He wouldn't let us sell them at first. We had to eat them.

**BK:** Till I knew that they were right.

**MK:** But until he got them to where he was happy with them he wouldn't let us sell them.

**JE:** That became a mainstay.

**BK:** Yes.

**JE:** You're as well-known for cinnamon rolls today—

**BK:** Absolutely, absolutely.

**JE:** Right. In fact, it's become part of your logo.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative), that's true.

**JE:** Cinnamon rolls.

**BK:** Yeah, I never expected it, it just happened.

**MK:** That's completely all his. I tried and tried to make cinnamon rolls years ago and friends would give me their recipe. I never could make them. They'd be flat, so I gave up, I quit trying. But he made them.

**JE:** But then the tweaking you did, it became your own recipe, then, at that point.

**BK:** Yes, um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And so, is that a secret recipe that nobody shall know?

**BK:** That's the secret.

**JE:** You might keep it locked away in a safe back here?

**BK:** That's right.

**JE:** But then you went on, you talk about breads. You did cinnamon rolls, and then you did the caramel pecan rolls.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And that was another idea of yours.

**BK:** Right. I thought, "Okay, you have the sticky buns that are known back East." And I thought, "You know, I'm going to make some pecan rolls, but I want to put a lot of pecans on them and sort of a caramel sauce with it." So I mixed it up and—

**MK:** And he started all the pies too.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative). I enjoyed baking.

**MK:** Because we had always bought our pies.

**JE:** That wasn't something natural, was it?

**BK:** That wasn't something natural. Once I became familiar with what made yeast work and sort of started understanding the process, then it became fun.

**JE:** What is it about it?

**BK:** There's a process. There are certain steps that you take to achieve a good end. You know, you start with yeast and you just have to understand what yeast is and what it does. You can't get it too hot or you'll kill it. It's just a process that you learn.



When I'm training people, I tell them, "You know, if you'll pay attention, this dough will tell you what it needs."

**JE:** Okay.

**BK:** You have to touch it and feel it to see the elasticity to see what it needs. When people can tell me what it needs, then I know I have a baker. And there's not too many people anymore that will come to that level. But they're out there.

**JE:** You're doing it here. Not by yourself.

**BK:** Right.

**JE:** You've trained people now to do it.

**BK:** Right, I've trained them, you know.

**JE:** To do that.

**BK:** And you can do it mechanically. I mean, we've got recipes, we have procedures that we do, that we use. You can pretty well give those recipes and procedures to a person and they can duplicate it.

**JE:** And biscuits too, then. Did you bring that up?

**BK:** We started that. We—

**MK:** The first day.

**BK:** ...the first day.

**MK:** From the first day.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative). And we keep adding things from time to time.

**JE:** The prices had changed by this time, hadn't they?

**MK:** A little. Now Bill knows more about that than I do.

**BK:** Right, dramatically.

**JE:** And so, remind me again, downtown the prices were?

**BK:** Ham and eggs, bacon and eggs were seventy-five cents.

**JE:** Okay, and then when you opened your doors in '75, they would have been what?

**BK:** Three forty-five, \$3.95, something like that.

## Chapter 09 - 1:50

### Faith

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**John Erling:** While you had people come from downtown, then you obviously knew that people were buying out here and building—

**Bill Kelamis:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** ...and all that.

**BK:** Right.

**JE:** And you were just part of this whole spreading of the South, weren't you?

**BK:** That's right.

**JE:** It was, I don't know, lucky, you figured it out, but you landed in a fortunate spot.

**BK:** Really did.

**Maxine Kelamis:** Well, he—

**JE:** And you had no idea how fortunate you were?

**BK:** No. No, I really didn't. We liked the place, but this center has always been busy, always been full. And we're very fortunate, very blessed.

**JE:** Speaking of blessed, you have a faith and you're very active, weren't you, in your church?

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** And what church was that?

**MK:** I went to Community Baptist for years. The kids grew up in University Baptist.

**JE:** Okay.

**MK:** Community, we built it when we had to move from the University Baptist Church.

**JE:** How did it work for you when you were working on Sunday? How could you go to church and work?

**MK:** I couldn't. But I saw that the kids got there. And then after my husband died, I told them, "I can work six days a week and I will, but I can't work late at night. And I'm going to have to close on Sunday, because I need to be home with the kids and we need to go to church."

So customers all agreed. They'd come for breakfast and then they'd come back and eat lunch. And then they'd come back and get something to take home for later in the evening.

**JE:** You know, your story about it was just work, you just needed to do it. I interviewed Paula Marshall's mother of Bama Pies—

**BK:** Um-hmm (agreement).

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** I don't know if you knew them, but—

**MK:** I knew the dad, is the only one that I knew. I knew him.

**JE:** He came and had the same work ethic that you're talking about. She would just say in the interview, "It's just what we did. That's the way we worked. That's the way we were."

**MK:** That's the way it—

**JE:** It's the same spirit that you have.

**MK:** That's the—yeah, I know, he worked hard. Harry Filactu worked for him. That was a Greek fellow that we knew. He worked for Bama Pie.

**Chapter 10 – 2:30****Take a Number**

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**John Erling:** Maxine, you've been the face of this business for a long time. And, Bill, you've become it now.

**Bill Kelamis:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And your son Evan—

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** ...is coming into the business as well.

**BK:** Right.

**JE:** When did you introduce “Take a number”? Because people would come here in line and wait. How did that come about?

**Maxine Kelamis:** It was pretty close to the first.

**BK:** We tried to figure out, “How can we do an orderly process where people would know who was first?” It was soon after we opened up we starting getting real busy. And on Fridays and Saturdays we'd have lines in the front. And so we just got numbers because we said, “We have to have some order here.” So that's when we started it.

**JE:** So that was in?

**BK:** Probably in the early '80s.

**JE:** There was something about this place that people will wait and wait and wait. Because not every restaurant will people wait.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** We go to a little restaurant up in Ketchum, at the lake, and if that restaurant is full, smaller than this, people just turn away, they walk away. They will not stand there and wait.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** But we're fortunate—

**JE:** Your people—

**MK:** ...our people wait.

**JE:** Your people will wait.

**BK:** Right.

**JE:** So the middle room was Jerry's Café.

**BK:** Right.

**JE:** And you bought that.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Now we're sitting in?

**BK:** In the first expansion, which is the South Room. We did that in '92. Then we did the north expansion, after we got busy and needed a bigger kitchen. We were running out of grill space, and so we decided to take the North Room. And we opened that, I think, January 2 of 2000.

**MK:** And now you've got an extra room.

**BK:** So now we have an extra room to eat, so it makes the going better.

**JE:** So you're trying to get more space here? That's nice.

**BK:** We're working on next door right now so that we can move our cooking area over there and free up more space.

**JE:** Isn't that a new part of the business?

**BK:** Yes.

**JE:** Tell me about that business.

**BK:** It's the same business, of course, but we have a bakery in this area. And we're going to have offices in the front and a bakery in the back.

**JE:** Okay. But don't you have a frozen—

**BK:** My son Evan has Savoy Foods, and it's a business where he wholesales and retails frozen goods. Frozen cinnamon rolls, pecan rolls, casseroles, biscuits—

**JE:** Can you order them online and they can ship them anywhere?

**BK:** Not any more. We did that, but he's changed over to more wholesaling to businesses around town, churches, and things like that.

**JE:** Oh? So that cinnamon roll that you tweaked, can be purchased—

**BK:** It's still going out.

**JE:** ...under another name?

**BK:** Savoy Foods.

**JE:** Savoy Foods.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** But the customer in some restaurant doesn't know it.

**BK:** That could be, that's right.

**JE:** In another restaurant.

**BK:** That's right. And they probably do know it.

**JE:** Yeah, they say, "Hmm, this tastes like Savoy's."

**Chapter 11 - 3:20****Savoy Magic**

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**John Erling:** I kid with Bill when I come in a lot.

**Bill Kelamis:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And we kind of enjoy probably the same sense of humor. But I say, “You could open a restaurant across the street and call it Savoy’s Spillage. And if you can’t get in here, go across the street and get in that one.” Because you probably have that one going as well but your hands are full.

There’s a certain magic, wouldn’t you agree? Probably you don’t want to analyze what the magic is. Like people don’t want to analyze what love is because if you figure it out, it’ll be gone.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** The magic that goes into this, but I can start out, it’s good food, first of all.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** You’ve got to have that. These people aren’t coming in here just because it’s a nice, clean place.

**BK:** Good food is a priority. A clean place is important. And good service is important.

**JE:** Right.

**BK:** Those are basically the three things that we try to really work on.

**JE:** But then I also think the other part of the magic is that Maxine, and now you, have been there. The owners are there. Let’s start by—

**Maxine Kelamis:** And are interested in the people.

**JE:** Right.

**MK:** Well, we enjoyed it. I did. And I know Bill does.

**JE:** They like meeting and seeing the owners.

**BK:** That’s right. And that’s important, I think.

**JE:** I would say it’s as big a component as maybe the other things. That’s what seals the deal, probably.

**BK:** Right.

**JE:** Wouldn’t you agree?

**BK:** Well, I think so, because it’s knowing there’s someone there that most people know and know by name. And I think that’s important to have that relationship with your customers. And if there’s something that they need they know it’s going to be taken care of.

**JE:** Right. I’m sure, Bill, and Maxine, you too, but maybe, Bill, you’re working in the back and so forth and you said, “No, I got to get out there and I got to talk to the customers.”

**MK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**BK:** Absolutely.

**JE:** That's part of your job.

**BK:** And I enjoy it, but that's my job too.

**MK:** But we enjoy that part of it.

**BK:** It's an enjoyable part, but you need to get the feel of what's going on and how the customers are doing.

**JE:** I bet both of you, when you go around and talk to people, you kind of hear conversations that maybe you wish you hadn't heard? Maybe there's some big hot issue in town and you hear them all talking about it? Is that true?

**BK:** Oh, lots of times, absolutely.

**MK:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** And politics?

**BK:** Politics.

**JE:** You'll hear that a lot.

**MK:** Yes.

**BK:** You try to stay sort of neutral.

**JE:** They probably drag you in. Politics and religion both can anger people.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** But you ever have political discussions between a couple of people and you've got to say, "Hey, guys, you got to hold it down"? Has that ever happened?

**BK:** Not really. I'm very careful if I speak to anyone about politics. And they have to bring it up and I have to know what they are. And so, in this town it's pretty easy to figure it out.

**JE:** You can figure it out.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Well, I thought maybe between two customers maybe you—

**BK:** Oh, between two customers?

**JE:** Right.

**BK:** Not usually.

**JE:** Speaking of politics, and I'm just going to say this for the record, today is July 21, 2016. The Republican Convention is now going on and Donald J. Trump has become the standard bearer for the Republicans. I mention this today because he's going to make his acceptance speech tonight.

And so, we sit here at this point, Hillary Clinton is the apparent standard bearer for the Democrats. And that will be next week. So here in 2016, we do not know who is going to be the next president of the United States.

Those of you who are listening to this, ten, twenty, thirty years from now, you'll know the story, but we don't know it yet.

**BK:** We don't know it yet.

**JE:** We have no idea.

## Chapter 12 - 1:42

### Traditions

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**John Erling:** The restaurant, you say it's your family, and you're aware of this, how much the restaurant and you become members of our family.

**Bill Kelamis:** We hope so.

**JE:** You know how important it is.

**BK:** Yeah.

**JE:** There are many traditions that are set here. Saturday morning traditions.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Can you kind of talk to me about that? Oh, I see those two people every Saturday morning?

**Maxine Kelamis:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** They sit in the same place and all that kind of thing?

**BK:** Actually, we have people that do that, that's what they do every Saturday. We have couples that meet—

**MK:** Seat, eat the same thing.

**BK:** ...sit at this round table.

**JE:** Yeah.

**BK:** And other round tables and they're here every Saturday visiting with each other. And it's a *family* type atmosphere. They get to know people that are sitting close around them. And it's sort of a community restaurant—

**JE:** It is.

**BK:** ...where everyone knows everyone.

**JE:** Right. And you've probably figured this out a long time ago, but in a way, it becomes more than just feeding mouths.

**BK:** Absolutely.

**JE:** This is a place where we bump into people we haven't seen in a long time.

**BK:** That's right.

**MK:** Yes.

**JE:** We used to do that in some of the big grocery stores, but some of them have folded and gone.

- BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- JE:** And so we do it here.
- BK:** Right.
- JE:** And so—
- BK:** We have a lot of people that see their neighbors or see friends that they haven't seen, constantly, and it's just sort of a meeting place.
- JE:** Business people will meet. I bet deals have been done here.
- BK:** Yes.
- MK:** Oh yes.
- JE:** In this restaurant. And probably been done on a napkin.
- BK:** Yes. We had builders back in the '80s, that everything was done on napkins and big deals were made, just at the table.
- MK:** Every day. Every morning, at noon, even.
- JE:** Some of them probably tell you too.
- MK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- JE:** "Hey, we just formed a company."
- BK:** Yeah, that's right. We had someone the other day that their first date was here and they got married and they wanted to come back here the day they got married. Or they found out here on a phone call that the wife was pregnant.
- JE:** Yeah.
- BK:** So just a lot of memories there've been.
- JE:** Yeah, it goes beyond peeling potatoes, doesn't it?
- BK:** That's it, it certainly does.
- MK:** It's just kind of like family.

## Chapter 13 - 3:07

### Biscuits One At a Time

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- John Erling:** Your family started a restaurant, a couple of times, actually.
- Bill Kelamis:** Um-hmm (affirmative), yes.
- JE:** And then you started this one.
- BK:** Right.
- JE:** And so, to start a restaurant today would be difficult, do you think?
- BK:** I don't know that it would be any difficult—
- JE:** Any more difficult than back—



**BK:** ...than when we started. I mean, you just do it.

**JE:** Yeah.

**BK:** And you have to be consistent.

**JE:** And of course, now, when they start restaurants they really get technical about their research and their demographics and where they are.

**BK:** Right. Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And those are things you didn't even think about when you started here.

**BK:** Not so much. You try to get a nice area of town that you feel is good, but, yeah, it's very technical now.

**JE:** The Internet wasn't up and running—

**Maxine Kelamis:** Uh-um (negative), no.

**JE:** ...back then in your day. But now we have reviews of the restaurants on the Internet. One of the rating services is called Yelp.

**BK:** Yes.

**JE:** Here is one. You don't have to be nervous, this is good. They're all good. They write, "Food is amazing, definitely. I try to stop every time I'm in town. Best breakfast, hands down. And this is coming from a guy who hates eating breakfast."

And then one more. And this is rather lengthy, I won't read it all. But it says that, "The Savoy is one of the hidden gems of Tulsa. Completely unassuming from outward appearances, this diner is a Tulsa mainstay. And if you're still searching for *the* breakfast place in Tulsa, you have to try Savoy."

**BK:** How nice.

**MK:** Now that's very nice.

**JE:** Yeah.

**BK:** And we appreciate that.

**JE:** I'm sure you get a lot of nice comments.

**MK:** That's nice.

**JE:** And then you probably get people who you just can't satisfy.

**BK:** Not too many.

**JE:** No?

**BK:** Not too many.

**MK:** It's amazing how you don't hear very many complaints.

**JE:** Okay.

**BK:** You know, every once in a while, but not too many.

**JE:** Yeah.

**BK:** And I think maybe sometimes people are just not having a good day. So you have to, you know, do the best you can, and try to do what you can to please them.

- JE:** I don't know if it gets on your nerves or not when people say, "This doesn't taste right." "We'll send it back." And then you send it back out again. And that could go a couple of times. For most people, they're probably satisfied the first time it came back.
- BK:** Right. Whenever anything like that does happen, our employees, we're supposed to be notified. And I examine why.
- JE:** Then you get involved in it.
- BK:** I get involved. If there's an issue I want to know immediately.
- JE:** Because sometimes it could be a problem.
- BK:** It could be an issue, yeah. It could be our problem, and it has to be fixed.
- JE:** Right. And sometimes it's not your problem, it's—
- BK:** And, you know, we'll do whatever they want us to do. If they want something else, we'll give it to them.
- JE:** Yeah. People have certain requests and probably things that aren't on the menu. Or they want things tried.
- BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative), right.
- JE:** My wife, Margaret, who's come here with me for many years, her father was Carlos. He was an educator, principal. He'd come in and he'd order, "Two biscuits, gravy on the side, and please bring the biscuits one at a time."
- BK:** Right.
- JE:** Because he wanted to make sure each one was hot.
- MK:** Well, I'm like him, I like them hot too.
- JE:** Did you have people making requests?
- BK:** Oh yes. Like now, we do, we have people that want hot cakes, "Hold the hot cakes, or hold the biscuits until I'm through with the rest of my breakfast and then bring the hot cakes or the biscuits hot."  
If we can do it.
- MK:** Well, it's better when it's hot.
- BK:** Yes.
- JE:** Yeah. It puts pressure on the waitress because the waitresses kind of have to remember it.
- MK:** Well, that's all right.
- JE:** Don't they?
- BK:** They do, but, you know, we want to try to please the customers.
- JE:** Sure.

**Chapter 14 - 5:30****Retirement**

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**John Erling:** How have food selections or choices changed over the years? You know, America since the '50s, became health-conscious and we're concerned with calories and the cholesterol and their weight. Fried or not, going back to the '50s. How has that changed, that you're noticed?

**Bill Kelamis:** People are eating a little differently. A lot of our menu is very similar to what we had back in the '50s. I mean, the bacon and eggs that we use, the highest quality stuff that we can use. We use vegetable oils as opposed to meat combination oils, you know, suet and things like that.

We tried to do the highest quality we can, but we've added a few things as we've gone along because you have to be aware of what people are wanting.

And we were just talking about it today. You know, the young people of today, they like lighter type fare, they want more fruit. Years ago, we didn't do fresh fruit, but now we serve fresh fruit on our breakfasts. So we've changed and try to have the things that appeal to other people. But we still have the same basic mainstays that we've always had.

**JE:** Smoking was allowed in the restaurant downtown, wasn't it?

**Maxine Kelamis:** Yes, yes.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

**MK:** And here, when we first moved here. I was happy when they stopped that.

**JE:** When you opened this restaurant, did they have smoking?

**MK:** Yes.

**BK:** Yes.

**JE:** And then when did you end that?

**BK:** About 2001, I think, something right in that time period.

**JE:** I remember that. And then there was always a conversation, not only at restaurants but at other places, "Are we going to lose business?" Did you lose business?

**BK:** No. A lot of people thanked me. The people who—

**MK:** More people were happy.

**BK:** More people were happy than not. Everyone was saying, "Well, now, are you going to consider going back to smoking?"

And I said, "I don't know."

Well, my server came over from the smoking room and she said, "You know, I go back to the medicine cabinet every day for headache pills and all this." And she said, "Do you realize since we stopped smoking I haven't had to take one at all?"

**MK:** And since we were happy when they stopped it.

**BK:** And I said, "You know, I could have pleaded ignorance before, but now I can't."

**JE:** No, right.

**MK:** You have to paint more often, everything.

**JE:** Yes.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative). There's more upkeep.

**JE:** Yeah.

**BK:** There really is. So it's been good.

**JE:** There's loyalty in customers but you had people working for you that have been loyal and then worked for many, many years.

**MK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Can you cite years? And maybe, at least, first names of the some of the people that worked for you waitressing?

**BK:** Well, we've had Wanda that worked for us for eleven years.

**JE:** And Wanda is the one who had her hair always done differently—

**BK:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...for every, each little holiday.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative). That's right.

**MK:** And every, all the decorations.

**BK:** That's right, that's right.

**JE:** And see what her hair was going to look like.

**MK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**BK:** That's right.

**JE:** So that was kind of fun.

**BK:** Audrey worked for us for twenty years.

**MK:** Yes, she got to where she had to have the surgery on her hand, couldn't carry the plates.

**BK:** We've had cooks that have worked for us for a long time.

**MK:** She still calls me. We keep in touch with some of them, or I do. Audrey.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** And Jan Russell.

**BK:** Sure. We like to keep people for long times if we can. Because if they get to know people and, you know, it's more of a family type thing.

**JE:** Yeah, we like familiarity when we—

**BK:** That's right.

**JE:** ...run into the same people when we're there.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And you've had that for a long time.

When you retired, did you want to retire?

**MK:** Not really. It was Bill's idea.

**JE:** He wanted his mother out of here.

**MK:** He wanted to get rid of me.

**JE:** I think he thought it was time for you to start enjoying life.

**MK:** Well, I was eighty, and he said, "You've worked all your life." He said, "You just need to take off and go visit a little bit and enjoy yourself."

**JE:** Right.

**MK:** Well, the first year was really hard. 'Cause I was used to getting up at four thirty, five, and being down here at five o'clock. But then I got active at church and started visiting at the nursing homes, and that was a blessing. I was still doing it when I was ninety.

**JE:** Wow. You have really been blessed with good health, haven't you?

**MK:** I have.

**JE:** I mean, to say that you wanted to keep working after eighty meant you didn't have a health problem.

**MK:** No. I didn't have any. The Lord's just been real good to me. I've been real healthy.

**JE:** And so you've gotten used to retirement, then, haven't you?

**MK:** After a year. It took me about a year. Well, I did visit a little bit, and then I got busy up there. And now I miss that I'm not doing that because I don't drive now. I finally gave up my driving. Nobody told me I had to but I just decided I was getting a little old to be out there in the traffic.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** At ninety. And the last two years, I had to buy batteries because I didn't drive enough to keep my battery up. And I didn't like that. And then, I thought, "Well, maybe it's time I just quit driving."

**JE:** You deserve a chauffeur at ninety.

**MK:** Yeah.

**JE:** You're now ninety-three. That's for sure.

**MK:** But I miss that car. Because I could get in that and go and visit and do things that I liked. I loved to visit.

**JE:** You know, we didn't mention, how many children do you have, Bill?

**BK:** Three boys, Paul, Alex, and Evan.

**JE:** Evan is the one who stayed with you in the business?

**BK:** Yes, um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And the other two are doing?

**BK:** One's in Utah, working there in financing. Alex is in Arkansas, a plastic surgeon. And then Evan was a CPA and decided to come to work here and open his own business.

**MK:** Bless their hearts, he and his wife both were CPAs and I was happy when he made that decision.

**JE:** Well, look how proud you are.

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Of not only of your son, of course, but your grandchildren.

**MK:** My grandchildren too.

**JE:** And now they're about to have a great, great grandchild.

**BK:** Well, the third.

**JE:** Oh, the third one?

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** It'll be the third one.

**BK:** In their family, yeah. It's great. Evan's been working here and just doing a great job.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** He seems to enjoy it, really.

**BK:** He does.

**MK:** It's hard work but you have to like it. If you like it, it's not hard.

**JE:** How old is he now?

**BK:** Thirty-six.

## Chapter 15 - 4:27

### Business Advice

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**John Erling:** Any advice to students, say, young people who are interested in their own business? Perhaps, specifically the restaurant business? You going to tell them to stay out of it, or go into it, or what are you going to tell them? Either one of you, what do you think?

**Maxine Kelamis:** What I tell them is that I like it, and I enjoyed every minute of it. It's hard work and it's going to be long hours and you're going to have to work hard. And if you don't want to do that, you'd better not get in the restaurant.

**JE:** Right.

**MK:** Because we had some at church that were wanting. They took my advice, they did not go in it. I don't think they realized. They just saw the fun part of it, you know.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** Fixing the food and they didn't see all that hard work.

**Bill Kelamis:** If you go into business, I know in the restaurant business, it was two years before I could recognize anything that I could count on, financially. You know, as far as business. We had good business, but it takes time to establish a consistent business and clientele. And if you're wanting to take money out of it the first day, you'd better figure something else out to do.

**JE:** Yeah.

**MK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** So it took you a couple of years maybe to have a fairly solid financial foundation.

**BK:** Yeah. In two years, I felt, "Okay, I can count on this."

**JE:** Yeah.

**BK:** And then it grew from there. But that's any business.

**JE:** Right.

**BK:** Too many people want to take money out early or spend more than they've got to get into business and they don't have enough to live on.

**JE:** Well, Maxine, when you look back on your life and the restaurants, any thoughts? How would you like to be remembered?

**MK:** Just that I was happy what I was doing. I enjoyed every minute of it, I really did. And I regretted retiring, but I got used to that too.

**JE:** Yeah, yeah.

**MK:** It wasn't something that I ever dreaded, even when I first started working. And, you know, I worked and went to school, from the ninth grade and through high school, I didn't go to college.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**MK:** But I was thankful my kids were all able to go to college. And even after Tommy died I had three, Bill and Julia. Julia was in her second year. But I made it. I was able to work and put them through college and pay our bills and do what I had to do.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**MK:** I'm just real thankful for all that.

**JE:** Well, you went through a big crisis there and you're to be admired, for sure, for what you did.

**MK:** You know, I'd get tired but I didn't mind the work. It was just something I had to do and I did it.

**JE:** Well, you passed this on to Bill and—

**BK:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** ...his family.

**MK:** Now he works more hours than I did.

**BK:** If you enjoy it it's not work.

**JE:** And the other ingredient about doing this is you have to like people.

**BK:** Yes.

**MK:** Yes. You're interested in people.

**JE:** Right, and they sense that.

**MK:** Um-hmm (affirmative). And you make a lot of good friends. I have friends way back.

One little lady, she's in a nursing home, we still keep in contact. But she used to say, "We thought you were so rich when you were sending the kids to church in a cab every Sunday morning."

I said, "We weren't rich. I had to work, and that's the only way we could get them there." Because we weren't rich, we were just working.

**JE:** Yeah. Bill, any comments, final words that you think about this restaurant or your mother, who you've got to admire so much?

**BK:** Oh, absolutely. Watching her and my dad, that set in place expectations of a lifetime attitude toward work.

**JE:** Right.

**BK:** I think that's important. I tried to instill a good work ethic in my kids. I'm sure they will in their kids. But attitudes have changed here lately.

**JE:** In 2016, it's tougher to find that work ethic?

**BK:** It is. I enjoy people. A lot of younger kids now don't interact that much with people. And I think that they're not experiencing as much as they should be able to.

**JE:** Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives). Well, thank you, both of you.

**MK:** It's been great.

**JE:** This was fun.

**MK:** It's good seeing you.

**BK:** Thank you so much.

**JE:** Your restaurant is an icon in our town and it must make you feel good to know that.

**MK:** Well, I hope he can keep it, that it continues on.

**JE:** But it started with your husband, Tommy, and you to maintain it all this time. We respect you a lot. Thank you, Maxine.

**MK:** Thank you, thank you.

**JE:** Thank you, Bill, for sharing this with us.

**MK:** Thank you.

**BK:** Thank you, John.

**JE:** Sitting here at the coveted round table, one of the few you have.

**MK:** We wouldn't be able to get this on—

**JE:** By the way, when I was on the radio I did my radio show here.



**MK:** ...a busy day.

**BK:** Yes you did.

**JE:** Several times.

**MK:** Yes.

**BK:** You certainly did.

**JE:** And I can't remember what drove me in, if it was politics, sometimes it was sports, I think, OU, OSU football.

**BK:** Right.

**JE:** We did some of those things from here.

**BK:** That's right.

**MK:** Several fun times.

**JE:** Yeah, that was always fun, so thanks, this was fun too.

**BK:** Hey, we appreciate you, John.

**MK:** Thank you. I enjoyed it too.

## **Chapter 16 - 0:33**

### **Conclusion**

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