

My Interview with My Grandmother

I interviewed my grandmother Thelma Grundy. She is the current owner of Thelma's Kitchen in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been working in the restaurant business since the early 1970's. She started off in a small restaurant on Bankhead Highway called TG's Sandwich Shop. It was a small place that seated 16 to 18 people. She served a variety of sandwiches and soul food items such as neck bones, pig feet, barbecue ribs, sweet potato soufflé, macaroni and cheese and much more. She enjoyed the location of the sandwich shop but she needed more room to serve her customers.

In the 1980's, grandma and granddaddy were riding through downtown Atlanta and they noticed a sale sign on a building on Marietta Street. Grandma and granddaddy contacted the owner and they leased the building. The name of the restaurant changed to Thelma's Kitchen. It was a larger building that would seat more customers. The menu included such items as steak, potatoes, sweet potatoes, broccoli casserole, squash casserole, macaroni and cheese along with pies and cakes. She still continued to serve soul food. She served a greater variety of items because there were more customers. In this restaurant, she had more space so she could cook homemade pies and cakes and place them in the windows as people passed by. The aroma from the soul food itself made people stop by to taste the delicacy. Beauticians would eat at her restaurant for lunch and would say that the barbecue ribs were good enough to eat without sauce. My grandmother stayed at this location for 8 years. The Chamber of Commerce moved into the location of my grandmother's restaurant and she relocated to a new location on Luckie Street in Atlanta.

She continued to serve soul food. She stayed at this location until around 1994 when the creation of the Olympic Park during the 1996 Olympics forced her to relocate. She is currently located on 302 Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia. She continues to have customers follow her to this new location because of the tastiness of her soul food.

My grandmother has won awards for cooking in the Atlanta Journal Constitution, newspapers in Germany, along with various states and countries. She has served people from the Democratic National Convention when it was held in Atlanta, Georgia. Also, she has served people like Ted Turner, Evander Holyfield, Bill Campbell and various lawyers, judges and dignitaries throughout the city of Atlanta. She has also prepared food to ship to other states within the U. S.

During the 1970's and 1980's dinner sold for about \$3.95 which included chicken, 2 vegetables and a glass of tea. In the year 2007, dinners are no more than \$10.00 a plate. Throughout the years nothing has changed except for the prices. My grandmother serves fresh vegetables everyday. She has always served fresh vegetables from the first day that she opened her restaurant until today. The restaurant has always been owned and operated by family members. They work 8-9 hours a day 6 days a week.

As I talked with my grandma, she told me that the gift of cooking ran in her family. She said that her aunt had a grocery store and served food. When people visited they always wanted to eat food. She told me an interesting story. She told me that her sister actually like to cook and helped her mother cook in the kitchen all the time. She was more outgoing and didn't think that she would have been a cook. She said that cooking is hereditary and a natural thing for her. It's a gift from God. She puts love in her food when she prepares it. She just thinks about a menu and ingredients come to her mind

about what's needed and the amount that's needed. For example, she is famous for her okra cakes. One day she had an idea to make a dish with okra. As she started stirring the okra, ingredients came to her mind telling her what was needed and the amount in order to make it tasty. It came out delicious and she is known for her okra cake as of today.

Cooking has been very natural for my grandma over the years. The hardest part about cooking was actually starting the business. In the 1970's, it was something new and grandma wasn't aware of all the business practices at the time but as the years went by things got easier.

My grandma uses a lot of commercial equipment (cooking for large amounts of people) when she cooks. It was different at first when grandma started cooking with commercial equipment but she quickly learned how to use the equipment. She also attended catering schools. The schools taught her how to prepare and present food to customers. My grandma really enjoys her work. She puts her heart and soul in it.

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