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Interview with Jody Wilson

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Jody Wilson

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Event: Interview with Jody Wilson

Place: Jody's Restaurant, Mt. Vernon

CM: This is Chris Meyers interviewing Jodi...what's your last name? Wilson...Jodi Wilson. The date is February 23rd and it's about ten after two. I guess if we could start by just you talking about how you got involved with Jody's and ah...

JW: Well I worked here. for Rich Cochran that owned it. And he was wanting to sell it. So I kinda looked around and we only had this part right here. This is all we had. This right here. And it had a big counter and tile floors and a lot of maintenance to it...carpet's better. And ah, so I just asked him one day...I said 'what do you want for this' and he quoted a price and I said, 'I'll get back to you.' Went home and asked my husband and said, 'you wanna buy a restaurant?' And here we are. 25 years later. And then we expanded over here...I'm not sure of the year, maybe '89? We cut holes in the walls and expanded and made a non smoking room and a party room.

CM: Oh so that room back there?

JW: Uh huh. And we just took it from there.

CM: Has the restaurant gone through any other major changes in terms of type of food that you serve or any other change or is it just...

JW: No, because we are strictly homemade cooking and homemade pastries and homemade pancakes...it's not a box.

CM: So where do all those recipes come from?

JW: Me.

CM: Really?

JW: Yeah. Mostly the desserts...a lot of them I had made up in my own head.

CM: Really, wow.

JW: And I have a cookbook that is strictly desserts that I sell. And ah, what I want to give to the community is good home cooking. And our menu is the biggest variety menu in Mt. Vernon.

CM: Oh yeah...definitely.

JW: It has everything on it. And we also serve breakfast all day long, which is a plus. A lot of people like that. We have homemade soups.

CM: But a lot of it just came right out of your head?

JW: Yep. Some of them from my mom. My mom was a great cook.

CM: Have any of those been passed on...?

JW: Yeah a lot of them.

CM: For...generations?

JW: From great great great grandmother on down to me and...

CM: Wow...and now you're sharing them with the...

JW: That's right...with the community...like um my mothers, or um, my grandmother's homemade bread pudding with the warm vanilla sauce is one, and ah...there's just a lot of...my famous apple pie with the warm vanilla sauce, a lot of that was my own. Yeah...a lot of it's...a lot of it I have made up in my head and a lot has been passed down from generation to generation.

CM: So...getting more on your family, can you talk a little bit about your life prior to Jody's? I mean what you did...how you...you grew up in Mansfield, you said?"

JW: I grew up on a farm...farm gal. And we lived 7 miles north of Mansfield on Bowman street road and there was all my relation there...we kinda called it landsville...that my maiden name. And I went to, ah, school up there. Graduated from Mansfield Senior High, 1950. And I went to Wittenberg College...and came down to Mt. Vernon because my father was a teacher for 45 years, and a principal in Mt. Vernon, so we located here. We located here there year I went to college...1950-51.

CM: And then Mazzas?

JW: And then I went and worked at Mazzas, and worked for all four of the Mazza boys, which are all deceased now, which was many years ago. And then I just...like I said, I came to work here part time for Rich Cochran, who owned it, and decided to confront him about it and see if he wanted to sell it. And he said yes, so we bought it, and here we are. 25 years later.

CM: Great! So you always wanted to ah...

JW: I always wanted to have my own restaurant...because I wanted to exploit my homemade pastries and my desserts and my home cooking, and all those. I wanted to, to share this with the community.

CM: Um...what do you think that Jody's function in the community is? What does it do inside Knox County and Mt. Vernon?

JW: Well...I would say that if Jody's went off of Main St. it would hurt the downtown.

CM: Yeah.

JW: Because we're pretty well established, and everybody eats at Jody's, and everybody from all over the state...even people in different states come here, because of Kenyon. Because of their parents coming in, and they, 'oh let's go to Jody's' and do this and do that. And we get a lot of Nazarene students and their parents. But I think that the family restaurant and the homemade cooking and the homemade pastries have a lot to do with the community. I mean...not do downgrade fast food, but people get tired of that. They want good home cooking. And I'm a farm gal and I know how to cook.

CM: What do you think...I mean speaking of that...it seems like you have the strip developing over on Coshockten Rd...have you seen any fluctuation in the crowd that you get here...anything since...has some emphasis been pulled a little bit from...

JW: Well I think that we...we more or less have our regulars, and we have people travelling through. And course the east end has hurt the small businessman, because of all the fast foods. And it has hurt...a lot of people will go out there and shop, and they'll stop and eat. So it has hurt...we have taken a crunch in that. But I think that with our reputation and everything...I think

CM: People will still be willing to come to town?

JW: People will come back. The only thing that hurts us is parking. It's...a lot of our people are older people, and we have all ages, but they can't find a place to park in front, they're not going to stop.

CM: In terms of the, the type of people that you get, you said older people, you said you get a lot of students, what other sorts of people...

JW: Oh, we get a lot of kids, because I have teddy bear pancakes, and butterfly waffles...we have a real good kids menu. And I have gone through, what, six graduating classes at Kenyon? And I have kids that came in here when they were toddlers, who are now bringing their children in. 'This is Jodi, I used to eat her teddy bear pancakes. You're gonna try.' So I have had generation after generation come through.

CM: Wow...do you see any...I mean can you point out any specific crowds. We talked a tiny bit about the after church crowd...what sorts of groups like that do you see coming in here?

JW: Well we have the bar association comes in, we have rotary, ah we have the athletic club comes in, we have what we call bucks and babes, which is an investment club. These people come in once a month. We have a lot of church groups that come in once a month. We have um, investment clubs, we have retired men's club, and the gas company

has their meeting here the first Friday – they're all retirees. We have several groups that come in. And we also specialize in banquets at night because we close at three everyday. So we have a beautiful banquet room over here. As a matter of fact we had one last night.

CM: Who was that?

JW: Ah..I think it was the Shriners. Was that the Shriners last night Don? (break)

CM: Do you...why do you think that people would choose to meet in a restaurant rather than, you know, in some hall some where...what does a restaurant have to offer?

JW: Well I think ah, basically the good food – one thing...the atmosphere. I have excellent help. And a lot of personality. They like...they get good service, and I can't talk enough about my help – their very good. But I think atmosphere has a lot to do with it.

CM: And to you find out...I mean in some of the informal groups that aren't just meeting in a banquet type setting ah...you know just regulars that would come in here...what attracts those sorts of people to the restaurant?

JW: Well I like to say Don and I, because we've been here for a long time, and we have a lot of friends, and the girls bring in different people that like their service and everything.

CM: And do you see people who just ah, will come in by themselves figuring that they'll see some local people in the restaurant?

JW: Oh yeah...a lot of people. A lot of people come in, they'll see...oh I know her, I'll join her. You know, we have a lot of 'joiners'. You know.

CM: Right...so it's very much a community atmosphere...

JW: Yeah..right.

CM: Um...do you see any, sort of group that doesn't eat here? I mean are their sorts of people that you won't see inside Jody's, or do you think it really covers...

JW: Well...I would say...my gosh, we get the bank people. Um...now the alcove over here gets service clubs.

CM: Yeah...I spoke with them yesterday, actually.

JW: They have the ah Kiwanis and all that, which takes some of our customers, because they have a dinner meeting over there. But, um, I can't think of anyone who wouldn't

come in here, unless it would be because of parking, or because they are attending a service club luncheon.

CM: What do you think...I mean speaking of the other restaurants downtown also, what do you think...what are restaurants important to this community other than ah, a place for formalized clubs to get together. Restaurants downtown seem to be the...a lot of the types of business that have stayed down here. I mean the alcove has been here for a long time, Mazza's has been here for a long time, you've been here for a long time, while a lot of the other downtown crowds are shifting. You said that you have regulars, but restaurants in general...what do they have to offer besides, maybe, just food.

JW: Atmosphere, and they meet a lot of their friends here. Um...like a lot of the retiree people – 'oh, let's go to Jody's, we'll have coffee', and they just like to get together, and they like our place. They like our atmosphere.

CM: Um...is there anything else that you'd like to add about restaurants, or about you and your history...about where you'd like to see Jody's, you know, going in a few years? Is there anything that you don't feel that you've accomplished that you'd like to.

JW: Well...My husband will be eighty next week, and I'm going on seventy. So I don't know. My daughter...that's my daughter...ah, is interested in carrying on the business, so I'm not sure what three years will bring. You don't know whether the bottom's going to fall out of your restaurant...you don't know that. You have no idea of the future, in any business. So I couldn't tell you. I really don't know three years from now, I may not be living, and, ah, I would like to continue on til I'm probably around 75, but I think once my husband's gone, I'll probably get out of the business.

CM: What keeps you in the business?

JW: People.

CM: The people you work with or the people that come?

JW: People that come in.

CM: How do they...

JW: I just...I'm a hugger. I get lots of hugs...get lots of hugs from the Kenyon kids. I get older people, and I've just been so active in the community all my life, that I have been the president of the kidney foundation, the cancer society, I have been active in the elks club, ah, I got the golden deeds award for the outstanding citizen of the year, um...there's just...I've been in boy scouts, girl scouts, brownies, cubs – I have always been very active. So I know...I know a lot of...

CM: So you know people.

JW: A lot of people come in to see me.

CM: Most of the faces that you see in here....

JW: Yeah...

CM: Do you recognize...

JW: Oh yeah...and by name. I have this thing about names. I can remember. Now I don't know how long that memory's gonna last.

(break)

CM: Now is there anything else you'd like to add about...

JW: No...I think we've covered base.

CM: Maybe...do you know the year that you bought this?

JW: 1976.

CM: 1976. Great. Um...I think that's all I have...thank you very much for your time...I'll stop this thing.