

**KAPPA SIGMA FRATERNITY:
JEAN FOSTER, COOK**

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--Jean Foster

FULL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION:

Jean Foster, cook
KAPPA SIGMA FRATERNITY
April 6, 2004 @ 1:00pm
Kappa Sigma Dining Room
University of Mississippi
Oxford, Mississippi
Interviewed by Amy Evans
[Approx. 13 minutes]

NOTE: Various sounds occur throughout this interview. Rather than mention them individually and interrupt the flow of the conversation, they are noted here. The interview occurred in the diningroom at the Kappa Sigma house. Even though lunch service was over, a few guys can be heard coming in to get ice and drinks, which are situated adjacent to the table where the interview is being conducted, and visiting with each other. There is also the constant sound of Mrs. Foster playing with the business card I gave her. She taps and swipes it on the table top for most all of the interview.

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Amy Evans: All right, this is Tuesday, April sixth, two thousand and four. And I'm at the Kappa Sigma house with Jean Foster--

Jean Foster: Um-hmm.

AE: --who is a cook in the kitchen here. And, Mr., Foster, if you wouldn't mind saying your full name and also, if you don't mind, your age for the record.

JF: Jean Foster. Sixty.

AE: Okay.

JF: Um-hmm.

AE: And how long have you been working here at the Kappa Sigma house?

JF: Eight years.

AE: And what did you do before that?

JF: Worked at the Beacon Restaurant [in Oxford].

AE: Oh, okay. How long did you work at the Beacon?

JF: Twenty years.

AE: My goodness.

JF: Um-hmm.

AE: That's some time in the restaurant industry.

JF: Yeah.

AE: Are you from Oxford originally?

JF: No, I'm from Marshall County.

AE: Marshal County?

JF: Um-hmm.

AE: Where in Marshall County?

JF: Waterford. A little--

AE: Waterford?

JF: Um-hmm.

AE: Okay. And how did you get to be in the restaurant business and--and be a cook?

JF: Oh, I just—you know, that's something that I kind of liked doing was cooking so, you know.

AE: Did you learn from a family member how to cook or teach yourself?

JF: No, I went to some food shows in Joh—in Jackson.

AE: Oh, really.

JF: Took-- took a food class. Uh-huh.

AE: Oh, okay.

JF: Mm-hmm.

AE: So what—what do you think sparked your interest in—in cooking.

JF: Uh, I don't know. I guess I just wanted to cook. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

JF: I guess I just wanted to cook.

AE: Mm-hmm.

JF: Yeah.

AE: Do you have, um, any brothers and sisters.

JF: Mmm-hmm.

AE: Do they cook?

JF: Um-umm.

AE: [Short laugh]

JF: No. Nobody in the family cooks but me. You know, that's got a job cooking.

AE: Mm-hmm. Growing up, did your mother cook?

JF: Mmm, uh-huh. She did. Yeah. [Sound of someone getting ice from the ice machine in the background]

AE: And s you say you went to food shows and things in—in Jackson.

JF: Yeah, to a food class.

AE: What did you learn there?

JF: Yeah, they--they taught us how to stir a lot-- stir dishes, you know. And taught us, you know, carried us over recipes and stuff like that, you know.

AE: Have you come up with any of your own recipes?

JF: No, I never really tried. But you know, I don't hardly use recipes.

AE: Oh, really.

JF: No, I just cook with my imagination. I use--

AE: Ohh, by feel.

JF: Yeah, uh-huh. And, you know. I—you know, I measure by, you know, by my own thoughts.

AE: Um-hmm, um-hmm. Do you cook at home?

JF: Um-hmm. All the time.

AE: What kind of stuff do you make at home?

JF: Uh, you know, just normal stuff: spaghetti, chicken, broccoli casserole, you know. Green bean casserole. Just little normal food, you know.

AE: Are you married and have a family at home?

JF: Um-hmm. I'm married but all my children grown.

AE: How many children do you have?

JF: Five.

AE: Do any of them cook?

JF: Um-umm [No]. Matter of fact, all of them teach school.

AE: Do they really?

JF: Uh-huh.

AE: Good for them.

JF: Yeah.

AE: Are they in the Oxford area? Or still in Mississippi?

JF: No. I got two in Jackson, one in Memphis and two in Marshall County.

[Short pause]

AE: Um, what was your time at the Beacon like? [Short pause] When you worked there?

JF: Oh, good times.

AE: Yeah?

JF: Good times. Yeah, I enjoyed working at the Beacon. It was a good time.

AE: When you—when you got into, um, the business as a professional cook, did you expect—I mean, cooking in big quantities like you do in a restaurant is very different from cooking at home. Was that something that you had to get used to or that you expected?

JF: Yeah, Yeah, yeah. You have to get used to cooking a lot, you know. Yep, you have to get used to that.

AE: Um-hmm. Do you think you picked it up easily?

JF: Yeah, pretty easy, you know. You just kind of have to judge it out with your own thoughts, you know, on how much to cook. You know, how much this to put in this, you know.

AE: Um-hmm.

JF: Yeah.

AE: Well, I know that the Beacon has lunch specials every day and—

JF: Um-hmm.

AE: --things like that—did you have much say in what they put on the menu?

JF: Oh, yeah.

AE: Yeah?

JF: Um-hmm. Yeah!

AE: What kind of things did you like to make over there?

JF: Oh, we made dressing, chicken and dumplings, all sorts of stuff. Squash casserole, Salisbury steak—we—we made all--everything. Made it from scratch. Biscuits. Rolls. You know, everything.

AE: Why did you leave the Beacon? **[COUNTER: 3:45]**

JF: Well, because they wadn't, uh, you know, you had to work on Sunday.

AE: Um-hmm.

JF: And I just—it—I was getting older and it was time for me to get in church.

AE: Um-hmm.

JF: So I just left. But me and Tony got a good relationship. My—

AE: Is Tony the owner?

JF: --boss. Uh-huh, yeah.

AE: What's his last name?

JF: Tony Mize.

AE: Miles? [The interviewer heard "Miles," but the owner of the Beacon's last name is Mize.]

JF: Um-hmm.

AE: Um—

JF: Yeah.

AE: So did you work seven days a week at the Beacon?

JF: Uh, a lot of times I did, and when I didn't I was off on Tuesdays.

AE: Oh, okay.

JF: Uh-huh. I just wanted to be off on Sundays where I could go to church on Sundays

AE: Did you do b--breakfast lunch and dinner over--

JF: Uh-huh.

AE: --at the Beacon?

JF: Yeah, I did all of them.

AE: My goodness.

JF: I would go in sometimes and do breakfast, and I'd do lunch. And I never did do supper too much because I never did work at night.

AE: Mm-hmm.

JF: I always worked during the day.

AE: How many other cooks did they have over there when you were working?

JF: Mmm, they had about four.

AE: Okay.

JF: Mm-hmm.

AE: And so how did you know that there was an opening here at Kappa Sigma?

JF: A guy named Peter Johnson. He worked over there at that [fraternity] house next door, and I told him to look out for me something wh—out here where I could be off on weekends. He did and—

AE: Do you like it over here?

JF: Yeah.

AE: Yeah?

JF: Yeah, it's okay.

AE: What's it like cooking for a bunch of young boys?

JF: It's all right. It's not bad. It's not bad cooking for them.

AE: How would you say it's different than the Beacon?

JF: Well, it ain't quite as hard as the Beacon. You know, because when you're at the Beacon, you know, you're just—cooking, you know, to--for how ever many come in, you know. But here you've got a number for, so you know what you're cooking for. So it's a little easier [here].

AE: Do you have some input in what—what comes out of the kitchen?

JF: What? Here?

AE: Um-hmm. Yes, ma'am.

JF: Uh, talking about what we cook and do?

AE: Yes, ma'am.

JF: Yeah, me and Ms. Gough usually sit down and make out the menu together. We sit down and go over the menu and make it out. First she give her advice, we give our advice. That's the way we do it.

AE: Mm-hmm. And what is your relationship like with these boys? Do you have some that—that keep in touch with you over the years?

JF: Well, not really. Uh, we—some of them we have good relationship with. Uh, we got some that's gone still calls us and do—you know. We have some that we have good relationships with. I think every group of boys, you know, you'll pick you three or four out that you'll have a good relationship with, you know.

AE: Um-hmm. Because this—I mean, on the—obviously a big difference here is that you have much more of a nurturing role—

JF: Um-hmm.

AE: --with these kids because they're here every day.

JF: Every day, uh-huh. Yeah.

AE: And, uh, it's—I would imagine that it would be a lot easier to have those kinds of personal interactions—

JF: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah.

AE: And so can you describe, um, a typical day here? When you come to work and what happens when you get here?

JF: Uh, we—I come in August. You know, when school first started back. I think they had been open like two weeks, and I come like the middle of August.

AE: And what do you do over the summer?

JF: Nothing.

AE: Nothing? [Laughs] Just rest, huh?

JF: Mm-hmm.

AE: Get ready for the next year.

JF: Yeah. Getting ready to put it down though. My time about to wind up.

AE: Oh, you're going to retire?

JF: Yeah.

AE: Really?

JF: Yes, ma'am. [Short laugh]

AE: How soon do you think that might be?

JF: Well, if I do one more year, that's going to be it.

AE: Okay.

JF: If I do one more. I ain't decided yet if I'm going to do one more.

AE: Yeah, well it sounds like you—

JF: I'm not sure.

AE: -- you've earned it.

JF: Yeah. I'm not sure. You know, I say I might try to do this next year. You know. But if I do this next year, that *will* be it. But I'm not sure yet. I might make this be it, you know?

AE: Yeah.

JF: I don't know. Honey, I've been in the kitchen for about [short pause] forty years. It's time for me to come out.

AE: Yeah. Will it be hard to leave here with—

JF: Nahh.

AE: No? [Laughs]

JF: [Laughs]

AE: No, you're ready to rest, huh!

JF: Yeah, I'm ready to rest. And you know—yeah.

AE: Well, Ms. Gough was telling me about—there are also some, um, special events that the fraternity hosts and especially in the fall—

JF: Yeah.

AE: --with all the special events that the guys have going on. **[COUNTER: 7:43]**

JF: Yeah, we have a tent, you know, called—for the ball games and, uh, then we usually have a little special dinner for the parents and, you know, little stuff like that for the parents. We usually have a graduation dinner for the ones that's graduating, you know. She's going to have it this year. But unfortunately, I'm going to miss this one.

AE: You are?

JF: Yeah, because I've got a niece graduating from med[ical] school in Alabama—graduating as a doctor.

AE: Oh, wow.

JF: So I'm going to her graduation.

AE: I bet you are.

JF: Yeah.

AE: That's incredible. Congratulations.

JF: Yeah, she—yeah, she finally made it. I told her it took her ten years, but she finally got it. [Short laugh] She finally made it.

AE: Well has—with those kids who are in these amazing professions--teaching and being doctors—has this been a good, um, way of life to support your family? Has it--

JF: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

AE: May I ask what your husband does?

JF: He, uh, do concrete work. He got his own business.

AE: Okay. Do you know many other people on campus who work for the University?

JF: Yeah, I know a few. I know Geraldine, the girl that work over there [points to her left]. And I know Lizzie Mae, a lady that work over on the girl's side. Yeah, I know—

AE: Okay.

JF: I know Darlene, a girl that work on the girl's side. I know a few peoples out here.

AE: Is there a comm—a community of like fraternity and sorority house cooks on campus that [allows] y'all to get together sometimes and have a picnic or something.

JF: Nah.

AE: No? [Laughs]

JF: [Laughs]

AE: Maybe swap recipes or swap stories or something like that?

JF: Nah, uh-uh. That would be nice for us to do though.

AE: Yeah.

JF: But we don't. Uh-uh.

AE: It seems like maybe there should be a campus cookbook or something, and y'all have some—

JF: Everybody puts—

AE: --some recipes published or something.

JF: Everybody puts some recipes in there. Yeah, that would be nice. Yeah.

AE: Yeah. Do you have some favorite recipes or things that are like signature items for you?

JF: Mmm, no. [Short pause] No, I don't guess so.

AE: You said you cooked by feel, I know, but maybe if there's something—

JF: Yeah.

AE: --that's like—

JF: Me and Ms. Gough stay into it about that.

AE: Oh, yeah? [Laughs]

JF: Yeah, because she want me to go directly by the recipe but I—

AE: That way you know what you're ordering and you know what you're getting?

JF: Yeah, but I tell her, when you're cooking for a large crowd?

AE: Um-hmm.

JF: You can't—ain't no way you can go directly by the recipe. You know, if you're cooking for one or two, you can. But when you're cooking for a hundred boys and they eat as much as two hundred boys, then you got to use your imagination. Then you got to use some common sense.

AE: Yeah. That's something that—

JF: Mm-hmm.

AE: --I'm curious about is that I was also asking Ms. Gough about this—about—and maybe you have an idea, since you know some people that work in the sororities—

JF: Mm-hmm.

AE: --what's it's like to—to cook for so many growing boys because I know they have appetites, and it would be—

JF: Uh-huh, yeah. Uh-huh.

AE: --interesting to know—

JF: Yeah, they eat. They eat good. In other words, if you're cooking for a hundred, and you've got to cook for like two hundred, you know, you've got to cook them two a piece, you know.

AE: [Short laugh] Do you know your friend who works over in the—in the girls side what kind of quantity they cook in?

JF: No. I don't--

AE: Is it very different?

JF: I don't know what they—I think they do a lot different food because they're with girls, you know. Got a lot of different—different little diet stuff and stuff like that.

AE: Mm-hmm.

JF: Yeah.

AE: Do the guys have some--some favorites that they tell you about?

JF: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they have favorites.

AE: What are some of those?

JF: Tacos, chicken strips, you know, hamburgers. They just children—little stuff like that. They don't care nothing about no—lot of hard food. They like fried chicken. But, uh, they just like simple food.

AE: Well, what time do you get here in the morning to--

JF: At nine.

AE: --start your day? Nine?

JF: Mm-hmm.

AE: And you stay through dinner?

JF: Yeah, till six.

AE: And are there guys who come in during the course of the day when there's a meal? Who just come in and snack or ask you to make something or--?

JF: Yeah, we have some that come in and want to make a grilled cheese or want to get peanut butter and jelly and something like that. Or ice cream or something like that.

AE: Um-hmm.

[Short pause]

AE: Okay. Well, unless you have something to add that I've left out—

JF: No.

AE: Any final thoughts? Or—I haven't asked you if you have any--any stories that stick out in your mind after eight years being in a fraternity house.

[Short pause]

JF: No, I don't guess so. [Short pause] No. [Short pause] I don't guess—well, one--one time they had a homecoming game and one of the boys, his name was Josh McKay, he took us to the, uh, over in the grove to the game. And it was so crowded over there, I tell you, we had to walk back, so I almost fell out trying to get back. [Laughs]

AE: Oh, no! [Laughs]

JF: He wanted us to go to the game, but when we got over there it was so crowded, so me and Sarah [Sarah Frison, another cook at Kappa Sigma] said, "Let's walk back to the house." We walked back to the house.

AE: [Laughs] Wasn't worth it, huh?

JF: Ohhhh! I ain't been back in the grove since.

AE: Oh, really?

JF: Mm-mmm, no!

AE: Do any of the guys ever, um, maybe hire you out to cat—to make food for them to—

JF: No, uh-uh. No.

AE: --take to the grove or anything?

JF: No.

AE: No? Hmm. Okay, then.

JF: All right.

AE: Well, I sure thank you for your time—

JF: You—

AE: --Mrs. Foster.

JF: You're welcome.

[COUNTER: 12:44]

[END]

