

**SIGMA NU FRATERNITY:
SANDRA PETTIES, COOK**

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--Sandra Petties

FULL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION:

Sandra Petties, Cook
SIGMA NU FRATERNITY
University of Mississippi
Oxford, Mississippi
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Interviewed by John Hunter Allgood

John Hunter: Could you please tell me your name and where you are from?

Sandra Petties: Sandra Petties. I am originally from Hernando; I have been living here ten years.

JH: What brought you here?

SP: Change. I got tired of living in Hernando and decided to move on down here.

JH: Do you have much family?

SP: My kids.

JH: How many children do you have?

SP: I got six.

JH: Where are all of them right now?

SP: One is living in Abbeville and the other five are staying with me.

JH: Can you tell me how you came to work here in the Sigma Nu house?

SP: I met Georgia over the summer. I was working at Bee's BBQ and I met here over the summer. I used to work across the street and that is really how I met; I was looking for a job and she was looking for a cook, so that is how I got here.

JH: What got you started working in food in the first place? You said you were working at Bee's?

SP: I got into food; My mama had six and I was the oldest so I started cooking, just.

JH: Did you learn to cook from your mother?

SP: My mother, my grandmother, my father. We got a lot of people know how to cook, so that is what got me into doing it.

JH: Is food a big deal in your family or not?

SP: Yea. Holidays, especially around holidays. We eat at my house on Sundays. I Sundays are a big deal because I am always cooking Sunday dinner, every Sunday.

JH: What kind of Sunday dinners do you like to cook, what does you family like?

SP: Just whatever I decide to cook. I always cook more than one thing, two meats and vegetables and stuff like that.

JH: When you started working here were you able to use the same ways of cooking in this kitchen as you do in your own?

SP: No, it's different. I cook different at home than I do here. Some things you can cook like at home, but a lot of the time we have to cook it the way she [Georgia] wants it or the guys wants it.

JH: Does that ever get frustrating?

SP: Sometimes. Sometimes it do and sometimes it don't. I just all depends on what we have.

JH: I understand you get an order of food coming in every week in large amounts and that you have to fix it the way Georgia wants, but are you ever able to do you own thing with it?

SP: Sometimes. Like I said, it all depends on what we have. Sometimes we cook it the way, you know; and then sometimes we try different recipes her

way and we might cook it with something different from the way we normally cook it. It is just hard to say, everybody has got their own way of cooking, at home or anywhere. It all depends on what we have.

JH: Has your job changed working in the houses over the years or has it been the same.

SP: No, it changes [*laughs*].

JH: How is that?

SP: Well you know, everybody is different. One year everything is kind of simple and stuff. But, the more you get to everybody, the more different guys come in, everybody has got different areas and different things cause all the guys. And all the guys have different taste in what they like to have. So it changes every year mostly.

JH: Do you ever get to know any of the guys very well?

SP: Oh yeah. I know quite a few of them. I don't know them by name, there's so many of them, but I know them. They come in the kitchen and speak and ask 'how you doing' and all this stuff; every day they make a point of doing that. They are some good guys.

JH: Have you kept up with any of the ones who have come and gone, or have any of them kept up with you?

SP: There has been a lot to come in They graduate and then come by just to say 'hey, how you doing.' Oh, a lot of them. They always come by and say 'hey, how you doing,' just knowing what they been doing since they been gone. They do that.

JH: Before you came over here to the Sigma Nu house, did you know anyone else or have any family working in the different houses?

SP: Uh-uh. I did not know anyone that worked at the University or fraternity house. My family worked at different places, factories and stuff like that.

JH: I have noticed that some of the houses, from house to house and in the same houses, some relations. It seems to be a family of sorts, whether a direct family or haven't gotten to know each other over the years. Have you gotten to know any of the people around here pretty well?

JH: Oh yea. I know all around the houses, from house to house we know each other. We visit some; we'll walk over there or they will walk over here, just like a family. It is just the way it is [*laughs a little*], we kind of take care of each other you know.

JH: Does that carry on outside of here on campus.

SP: Well, when you get to know each other, like me and Mrs. Ethel, outside we good friends. She just like a mother, my mother is not here, she staying in another place, and when we not working I still get a chance to see her or she see me or something like that. You know, it is just the way it is.

JH: How has your cooking changed since you got to know her [*Mrs. Ethel*]?

SP: Well, certain things like I said, certain ingredients she use I didn't use. Certain ways she cook a lot of food, all kind of food, pies, cakes, bread. She cooks things entirely different, but it taste better. So I pick it up [*laughs*].

JH: Sometimes you don't know exactly what it is, but there is something about it.

SP: That's right. A lot of experience with her. She has been cooking a long time, so whatever she says goes.

JH: Just, she says it and you do it and it turns out okay. [*pause*] How did Tarence come to get here? [*Tarence is Mrs. Sandra's son that works in the EN house and kitchen*].

SP: When I, one of the guys that used to work for us, he had a stroke, and so we needed somebody else and he was available, he was not working. So, Mrs. Georgia ask him to come in and so that is how he got here.

JH: Did you end up [*I say something inaudible*].

SP: I don't really know. He learned a lot since he been here, but he is one of my kids, he already know. He can cook. He can cook, clean, do whatever. Whatever there is to do he can do it.

JH: Does he seem to like it all-right?

SP: Yea, he like it.

JH: You said you learned how to cook from family. Are there any certain recipes that you particularly like or keep around.

SP: I am the type I like to try lots of stuff, I don't have any certain recipes, I'll try anything. I mean, I am always looking for something different. I like Italian food, Mexican food, you name it I'll try to cook it. I am like that at the house, find me something, use my kids as guinea pigs, 'try this, try that.' So I am always trying something. I don't have no certain recipes, I just like to try different kind of food.

JH: Are there any recipes that have been in you family a long time?

SP: Well [*pauses and thinks a moment*]. Well, not really. We just like to cook. My grandmother, before she passed, there was lots of food she cooked. Like sweet potato pies, butter rolls. I am not good at butter rolls. I am okay at sweet potato pies, but I am not really a sweet person, I am a more just a like to cook, just food. But my mom and my sister, they like to cook different kinds of sweets, pastries and stuff like that.

JH: Are butter rolls just regular rolls?

SP: Yea, you have to make it. I think it is flour and a lot of sugar, pure butter, flavor. It taste, oh, how can I say it tastes, it taste more like a pound cake but it's rolled up like a twisty dough-nut or something like that.

JH: I have never had that.

SP: That is old, old-timey recipe. Butter rolls.

JH: Well, I like butter and I like rolls. It has got to be good.

SP: Yea. [*laughs and trails off with a sigh*].

JH: Can you tell me what your typical day is like here, when you come in and what you have to do?

SP: When I first get here I start working on my salad.

JH: What time is that?

SP: I come in about nine, sometimes if we have a busy day I come in about eight. Usually I come in I work on my salad, get my salad did. Then I come around and ask Mrs. Ethel if she need any help and where cause lunch. After we get lunch prepared then we work into dinner cause everything is on a schedule. We look at the schedule and see how the schedule is looking for the week. That is my day, that is what I do when I come in, cause I have to get my salad bar ready. Whatever else you got you do.

JH: Does Mrs. Ethel run things and you do what she says, or do y'all have different things that you do?

SP: We have different things. Like when I get through I am automatically coming over and asking how she need any help with anything cause she has a lot of cooking to do. When I get finished with my salad, whatever she wants me to do or needs me to do I go and start doing it. When we get through with lunch, both of us will work getting prepared for supper, whatever kind of meat we got to get prepared or bread we got to do or something like that.

JH: So it is all a continuous thing from breakfast to supper to the time you are done?

SP: Just about. Just about.

JH: What time do you get done?

SP: We break it down about six fifteen. But we get started most of the time about four forty-five or four fifty, supper is out. And from then on until six fifteen, six fifteen we shut it down and that is when we wrap it up. We try to get out of here at least by six thirty. Sometimes we stay a little over.

JH: DO you have any particular thing you like about this job?

SP: Well, it is just a job. I like my co-workers now, we just like family. But I just look at it like a job. I got to work and I like cooking, so that is it.

JH: From what I have seen it does seem like you all get along well.

SP: Oh yea, we get along great. I probably would not even want to work with nobody one else if I had to.

[Mrs. Ethel, sitting in the room, says something and Mrs. Sandra laughs. I don't know what she says.]

SP: Yea, she keeps me in line *[laughs more about what Mrs. Ethel said]*. Some days I have a bad day, I come in and Mrs. Ethel ask if everything is all-right.

JH: You said you have some days that wear you down' you have a lot to do. You said you cooked sixty pounds of bacon yesterday, seventy pounds of ground beef?

SP: Oh! Yes. We came and started preparing bacon up Tuesday, what was yesterday, Wednesday? We panned bacon up Tuesday night, first thing Wednesday morning we got started. I get here she was already cooking; I did not start on nothing else until I helped her get caught up on the bacon. Then I ran over there and got my salad stuff did, then I come back over here and we cooked bacon and we cooked bacon and we cooked bacon and we cooked bacon. And after we finished the bacon, then we started mixing up the ground beef getting ready for meat-loaf.

JH: And y'all have to cook that bacon in the oven right?

SP: Yes.

JH: How long does it take to cook sixty pounds of bacon?

[Mrs. Ethel makes a comment on how long; it is inaudible]

SP: Six thirty, you started as soon as you get here that morning? [*Mrs. Ethel says what time*] About eight. I think about twelve thirty, twelve forty-five, that is when we stopped with the last pan. So we was cooking bacon yesterday. A lot of bacon.

JH: Y'all told me something a few days ago something I would not have realized. You said that this is an outdated kitchen, that it is smaller than it should be.

SP: Yea, very.

JH: So how is it working with this kitchen? Is it tough, or do you learn how to deal with it?

SP: No, we deal with it. Some days it gets rough, but we have to deal with it. Like I said, in order for us to get everything, in order for us to get it did, that is why we work the way we have to work. I get in, she get in, she get in and work with breakfast. When we get finished with breakfast we go straight to lunch and from lunch straight to dinner. Cause if we didn't, it would not get done.

JH: What do you need in here? More stoves or oven?

SP: We need more oven, we need more deep fryers, we need more kitchen utensils. Cause we don't have the space to put all the stuff, this is what we got. So, I think we do a good job for as many boys as we have to feed.

JH: There has always been an idea that food brings people together, that a place to eat is a central place for community. Can you see the boys coming together out here?

SP: Oh yea, they enjoy it, they love it. They know we work hard. There is not a day or night goes by they come in and say 'we appreciate it.' You know they appreciate what we do and like the food. They appreciate it, they know we work hard.

JH: Are there any things you cook on a weekly schedule? I know you have burgers every Thursday. Is there anything else on other days?

SP: She tries to fix it so we have different kinds of food. But Thursdays and Fridays is the same thing. Burgers for Thursday night. Thursdays we have leftovers, we have leftovers for Thursday lunch; veggies and greens and peas and okra and stuff like that. And Friday is always a fry day. You know about Friday.

JH: Yea, everybody has fried Friday.

SP: Tomorrow is spicy chicken, French fries. Maybe next time we'll have chicken tenders and French fries. She tries to give them a variety, but it is all we can handle this kitchen being so small.

JH: Do you think any change might come with the kitchen?

SP: I hope so. We will have to wait and see, next semester or something.

JH: Well, that is about it for now. I thank you for the time and help.