Interviewee: Terry Wong
Interviewer: Ann Shi, AnhThu Dang
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Transcribed by: AnhThu Dang, Helen Pu
Edited by: Ann Shi
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Background:
Terry Wong is one of the three ‘Blood Brothers’ of the Houston famous Blood Bros. BBQ, located at 5425 Bellaire Blvd. The restaurant was established in 2013, and opens from Thursdays to Sundays only, from 11am until when food runs out. The Asian fusion BBQ introduces innovative menu items that focus on stronger and more exotic tastes in addition to the already flavourful Texan tastes. It ranges from brisket fried rice, Thai green curry boudin, to burnt end banh-mi sandwich… the menu is a cultural and culinary scene of “East meets West”.

Terry manages the customers at the front of restaurant which allows him to see the reactions from customers as they taste the food; his brother Robin (or Robbie), manages the kitchen, marketing and PR, who was also being interviewed by HAAA separately; their non-blood related ‘brother’, Quy Hoang, who is Vietnamese Chinese, is the pit master of the BBQ. Their culturally diverse and fresh-minded restaurant has gained publicity from the New York Times, Houston Chronicle, bon apetit, Smithsonian Magazine, among others. The brothers are working on “Asian Food Network” which gathers many great Asian restaurants in Houston to promote the Asian food culture as a community.

Setting:
The interview was conducted in a private study room in Fondren Library, Rice University.

Key:
TW: Terry Wong
AD: AnhThu Dang
AS: Ann Shi
—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
…: speech trails off; pause
Italics: emphasis
(?) preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)
Interview Transcript:

AD: Today is March 7, and we're at the Fondren library interviewing Mr. Terry Wong. My name is AnhThu Dang. [AS: My name is Ann Shi.] And now we shall begin the interview. And so to start the interview, can you tell me where and when were you born?

TW: Born here, October 5, 73, in Houston, Texas. At St. Joseph's, I think.

AD: And so, how would you describe the household grew up in?

TW: From what I remember, pretty normal I guess, for– for the beginning anyways. And then our parents divorced, so we moved a little bit. For a little while, we lived with our grandparents. Then after that, lived with our dad until I think seventh, seventh grade. I think if I remember right, then moved in... Well, when I was in eighth grade we moved back with my mom. And then from then on.

AD: And so you and your brother are now co-owning the restaurant. So can you tell us a little bit about how your relationship with your brother was during your earlier years? So were you two always close?

TW: I don't know about close. My little brother was a kind of a loner actually back then, a lot. I was into sports, basically all... During my younger years, so I basically hung out with, you know, my other sports fanatic friends. And my– my brother was more of a loner, but he was into music. And he liked sports too. So... So I mean, I guess from that aspect, we did play sports together or listen to music together. But, you know, it's, you know, we weren't like, you know, inseparable, like some siblings. Do you know what I mean? So...

AD: And so from what we know your father's from Tennessee, which is famous for barbecue, and your mother's from Taiwan. [TW: Yeah.] So there must be a lot of fusion in your home, cooking? [TW: Yeah. Very, very.] So can you tell us a little bit about that? What's your favorite dish?

TW: I mean, I consider us lucky because, you know, my father's half Caucasian, and half Chinese. And then my mom is Chinese. So you know, we get... If you're a foodie, you know you– you get like country, you know, comfort food. And then if you like Chinese food obviously, you know we have that. So my dad's kind of, my dad's side is kind of Cantonese style, because my dad's Toisan. And then my mom's from Taiwan, so delicious food.

AD: And so with all the food background, how did you come to start with Blood Bros BBQ?
TW: It kind of... It started... My brother and I own a karaoke bar called Glitter. With that way, though, we actually started back in ‘99, 2000 in Chinatown. And we did that for five years. And we took a little bit of a hiatus, reopened in Midtown which, which is where it is presently. And we did a steak night with our buddy Quy. And basically Quy loved to grill, and kind of started messing around with barbecue. So he brought some over to our steak night and we kind of... Robbie and I, my brother and I, do customer appreciation parties. So whenever we do that, you know, we cook all this big, you know all this food and by the customers, and you know, they have our food. So when we started messing around with barbecue, we did that and that was we added in some barbecue with our, you know, other stuff. And the customers loved it. So Quy started messing around with it more. And our friend Chris Shepherd invited us to his restaurant to do a barbecue. So we did that. And it was very, very well received. And that's really kind of what, what really got us into considering doing it more often. Because at that point, we weren't even, we weren't even doing it like once a month. I don't think at that point. After that we started, you know, people started asking us, “Hey,” you know, “can you do events for us?” Or trying to order our food. So that's when it kind of became at least— at least a monthly thing, sometimes twice a month. Because at that time, we just didn't have time. It was more of a getaway from our, you know, from our regular grind.

AD: And so since you mentioned Glitter Karaoke, is it still in business? [TW: Yes.] Okay. And when you first started Blood Bros BBQ, did you receive any support from your parents, your friends, your community?

TW: Oh, yeah, yeah, definitely. Definitely. From that aspect, We're very fortunate for most from the get go. Our customers from Glitter, our friends in the restaurant business. You know, they supported us. So we're honestly, we're a lot luckier than most people that start any, you know, a food thing. We're very lucky.

AD: So how would you describe working with a family member?

TW: Um, well, I mean, I'm used to it, because I've worked with my little brother for 20 years. So, you know, I'm not gonna lie to you. I don't know if you guys have siblings, you know, there's— there's pros, and there's cons. You know, so you know, you're not always gonna get along; but I think there's some of the pros are, at least with me. I mean, everybody's different, you know. But at least with my brother, I mean, I never have any trust issues. You know, at the end of the day, I— you know— I don't worry. It's just in between business time, you know, maybe we'll butt heads or whatever. But that's, that's anybody.

That's kind of the same thing with Quy. You know, I mean, he's like our brother, even though we're not blood, you know. Even working with him, you know— anybody, as much hours in a
week—you're going to, you know. Somebody is in a bad mood one day, or maybe you don't like their tone of voice, or, you know... misunderstandings. You know, you just you just have to, you know, let it fall off.

**AD:** And how would you describe your role in managing the restaurant?

**TW:** That's kind of hard. I'm... I guess I can describe it as everything else. Okay, so Quy does all the meats, right? And Robbie does all the sides in the kitchen, and kind of, both of... Robbie basically manages the whole kitchen. And a lot of the social media. Robbie’s a graphic designer, which is obviously helpful. If we ever need a menu, my brother designed it. If we ever need something on Instagram or whatever, Robbie can, can do it. So that's obviously, you know, great help.

**AD:** So would you say you're like a store front manager?

**TW:** Yeah. Yeah. You know, I'm the guy that deals with the customers, the phones, the caterings. And, you know, I— I guess, the networking promotions part of it.

**AD:** And what would you say is the thing that sets the restaurant apart from the competition out there?

**TW:** I would like to think the food is good. I mean, I'm a little biased— okay I'm a lot biased. I think our food is good, but we kind of take the same approach, just like we do in the bar business. Like, in the bar business there, there's a million bars in Houston, in the world. You know, in—in Taiwan and China and Vietnam— wherever, there's a million bars. You can get a drink anywhere. So why do people want to go to your place? It's the service, right? So, I look, I, you know, Robbie and I tell our– our staff the same thing, okay. You know, it helps if our food is good, if the food quality is good. But at the end of the day, it's the *service*, you know. There's good barbecue that, I mean, the Houston just got— you know, what is it? “Most popular food destination” and— and I don't know in the world, but in America, I mean. So there's obviously no shortage of good food. Interesting so...

**AD:** So what vision do you have for your restaurant?

**TW:** That's a tough one. We've gotten so much publicity that I don't even, I don't even know what to kind of strive for. I mean, being in the *Smithsonian* is probably the pinnacle, and *The New York Times*, so I don't know. I don't want to sound arrogant either. Like, I'm not grateful, because of course we are. But yeah, it's amazing. It's amazing.
**AD:** So with that being said, Do you like do you imagine where your restaurant would be five years?

**TW:** You know, we talked about that often, because we're very lucky we have, we have a lot of interested parties offering us to come, you know, expand to their shopping center, or do something in another state, or whatever. But we're— I mean, we're just really new right now, so we were just concentrating on, you know, the Bellaire area right now, you know. Maybe five years down the line, you know, maybe. But we just want to, you know, concentrate on one right now. And be the best we can be.

**AD:** And so with your experience at the karaoke, how is it helping you with the restaurant?

**TW:** Like presently, presently, I mean, probably not helping us; but I definitely feel like Glitter Karaoke was a– was a vehicle to get to this point, which– which I can tell you all three of us are super grateful, immensely grateful. Because, you know, obviously, if we didn't do— have Glitter and do a steak night, and then my brother and I did chef pop-ups, none of none of this would even exist. So very important.

**AD:** And so as a restaurant owner, how would you describe Houston food scene?

**TW:** I love our food scene, you know. I'm sure my brother told you I mean, we were, we grew up in Alief, which is basically Chinatown. So, and we discussed, you know, coming up here that you know, it's very important to me, because that's where we're from, not just the food. We just grew up in that area, literally. So very important to us.

**AD:** And so, did you face any difficulties when managing the restaurant? I'm sure you have?

**TW:** Oh tons, tons, tons at the restaurant, tons at the bar. We went through the same thing that basically any, I'm not even going to say restaurant—any person that's— does a brand new construction business. I mean, you have all these permits that you have to do. Everything has to be on a time, time schedule. And when you're dealing with—with city, and the permits, and monies... it's just— it's basically, it's never on time. Let's just put it that way. There's— there's always delays. We had Harvey to deal with— Hurricane Harvey. That— that put a delay on us. Not as bad as a lot of people, but it definitely was a delay.

**AD:** And so how has the food scene, in your opinion, especially in the barbecue food scene more specifically, in Houston changed over time?
TW: A lot. So when we first got into barbecue, I guess, it's six– six to seven years ago is when we, I guess we started. That's when it was just barely starting to have a– have a scene. Of course that's not the case now. Now– now I mean, it's Houston; it has a lot of great barbecue. And it's a bright alongside— I mean— comparable to Austin and, and, and Lockhart, which are the— you know, barbecue capitals. But I feel like Houston is just right there.

AS: So how do you see the different neighborhoods involved, like the way they come together? I believe your cuisine is a fusion. For example, how do you see that the fusion become a thing in Houston?

TW: I think– I think that's more of a result of– of food globally. And, and then of course, you know, nationally here in America. And, you know, I, you– you, we get to– we get to thank, you know, Food Network and– and YouTube and all that stuff for all that; because you know, there's so many chefs out there that want to do something different, you know.

So that's kind of like us, I mean, even– even– even before we started, even considering food, you know, we were in the bar business. So when we– when we started the bar, I didn't want to be like, just like every other karaoke bar, because that's boring; being– being the same is boring. People get bored. ‘Cause like I said, there's plenty of bars. So why– why do people want to come to your bar? We have to do something different, you know, so that's why I wanted to do a steak night. You know? ‘Cause, yeah, bar— a lot of bars, most bars now, of course; but you know, seven years ago, that's kind of when steak night kind of took off, at least here locally—I'm not saying nationally.

So you know we wanted to do that. And then we're like, You know what? Let's try, you know, chef pop-ups, because we had– we had a lot of chef friends so I asked them, you know. What– what do I have to lose? They say no, who cares? At least I asked, right? Well, I mean, I asked, and they said, “Sure.” So that's– that's how it began. And we've had some pretty famous chefs that did pop-ups at our bar. So it's pretty cool. Very cool.

AS: Did you have many innovations during this process?

TW: Definitely. I mean, that's, that's really having all those chefs, in my opinion, is kind of like what kindled our interest more in cooking. Because we always– we always love cooking. I mean, we moved out very early. So if you move out, you don't have mom's cooking. So you, unless you want peanut butter and jelly every day, you gotta learn how to cook, right? So that's what we did. But yeah, when– when you get to watch, you know, chefs, “Oh, that's how they do it.” Or, you know. “That's how they do this or that. Oh, that's, that's pretty interesting!” You know. So, that had a lot to do with it, you know.
AS: Are these chefs from the same cuisine or different?

TW: Oh all over all over. I mean, we had sushi chefs. But you know, the good thing about— the good thing about our pop-ups is that— that's what makes it fun. Because when a chef is at their workplace, they have to do, what they— what the restaurant's menu is. Why they have so much fun that their pop-up is they get to cook whatever they want. You know what I mean? So they can, they can do a bulgogi french fries whatever. They can't do that at a restaurant, if they work at a sushi bar, they can't do that. They have to do, you know, you know, sashimi or something? You know? They can't do it. I'm not saying they don't want to do that. But that's, you know, they get to have fun at their pop-up.

AS: Sounds like a jamming session.

TW: Yeah, exactly. That's exactly what it is, you know, for a chef. So it's a jamming session, and they can make some money, you know? So that's the other point. So that's the other purpose of a pop-up, you know. A lot of chefs say, you know, “If you're not the executive chef, you're a sous, or you're a line cook, the pay grade is a big difference.” So pop-ups can make, you know, help them make extra money. So...

AS: So whose the original idea is with this, to do a pop-up?

TW: I don't know. It was kind of, like, around the same time so; and you know, it's– it's at the bar, so who knows? Who knows? At that time, it was big in New York, because, I mean, that's honestly that's why we can, you know, kind of, yeah, that's kind of cool. They do that in New York. Why don't we do this? You know.

AD: And so barbecue, which is kind of like a Texan thing. [TW: Yes. Definitely!] So how did you add the— the Asian elements into your food? Or in this case, the Asian spice.

TW: Again, that's just Robbie, Quy and I, you know, we, we love to eat. Period. And, and not, not just Asian food, I mean; we– we love, you know, Iranian food, Indian food. We love everything, so. And we love messing around, you know; just testing stuff, and tasting. So that's— that's just kind of the way it evolved. I mean we didn't set out to do a Thai sticky rib, or— or curry buden, or, you know, the Jinan pork belly. We didn't set out to do that, you know, we just messed around; and we were like, “Hey, you know, I wonder if pork belly will taste good with Jinan marinade.” So we tried it, and it was great. Yeah, so.
AD: So would you say that with a start-off point as a foodie rather than a professional chef, [TW: Oh definitely. Yeah, definitely cause none of us are chefs.] Do you think it allows you more space to be creative and more diverse with the food?


AD: And so, so that being said, do you face any challenges to serve? Like, this innovative food around here? How did, how did the people react to it?

TW: Again, we're really lucky. You know, we've actually been finding that... I'm not going to say everything; but so far, almost everything that we put out, even as a test run, it just gets great responses so far. I mean, people just will put up— “Oh,” I'm just saying, for example, if I put up, “Tomorrow we're gonna do...” like our– our last sausage was, “... a togarashi shishito peppers sausage”. People see it on Instagram, and they just come. So we've been lucky. You know?

AD: And so when you're like building up a menu, do we have any target population that you're working toward?

TW: We just, everybody, everybody. We try to target everybody. Again, wherever it may lead, so it's very diverse. So, again, we just try to– we try to kind of get everybody. Bellaire, where we're located, is actually a pretty diverse area too. And it's just super close to Alief, to Chinatown too, so. I know at least at least from my standpoint, I feel like Asians in general, are one of the– one of the ethnicities that are just really good about supporting other Asians. Yeah, I feel that way. You know?

AD: Are you involved in many activities of the Asian community here?
TW: Honestly, before the– the– the virus stuff that's going on right now, honestly I wasn't. But like I said when it happened, I just feel like, We got to try. You know, so.

AD: So can you tell us more about your involvement?

TW: I have a buddy. Well, I've, I've got a group of buddies that I basically approached that are in the business. They either own a restaurant, or are involved with food. Like I asked my friend Tao that his– his– his family owns “Kim Son”. He said, “Of course.” And my other friend Thomas Nguyen owns a restaurant called “Peli Peli”. So he's– he's going to be involved with it. Our friend Chris Shepherd, he's involved. Also Kate McLean, another– another chef is involved. Who else did I bring on? Chris Wong from “Ninja Ramen” is involved. Debbie Chen from “Shabu House” is involved. She's also an attorney. She's also one of the Chairpersons at the OCA. So I'm not necessarily trying to get all Asians; I'm just trying to get people that can get
stuff done. And they're– they're also passionate about all food, including, you know, Asian food. So, especially our buddy, Chris Shepherd. So he's a member I mentioned that we were on that I brought them on Fox the other day. They were all on there. And if you want the link, I'll give it to you.¹ But there's other people that I'm going to ask too, for some other ideas because... yeah, we got to do it fast.

**AD:** And so how do you identify yourself? Do you identify yourself as like a Taiwanese? American? Asian American?

**TW:** That's a tough one. I tell, I just tell people I'm a mutt. [AS & AD chuckles] My mom was originally born in China. Like a lot of people that they're from Taiwan, she– she– she was born in Hubei, in China, along with all of her– her brothers. And then they went to Taiwan during the war. Then my dad’s side; my dad is– my dad's father was– was from Guangdong. And then came here, I think, in the 20s, where he met my grandmother in Tennessee. And then yeah, had my– my dad.

**AD:** And so I know we talked about how you love food and being a foodie stuff like that, [TW: Yeah.] do you have like a specific favorite dish?

**TW:** Man. For Chinese food, my favorite dish is beef noodle soup. Easy. A tie probably, that and *Hong Shao Rou* [Chinese for ‘red braised pork belly’]. That those two things. Man! For American food, that's tough. That's really tough. For Mexican food, easy. Say it's a good taco. For Vietnamese food. That's a really hard one. [AS: Too many.] Too many, but probably just really good Pho. I love Pho. I love Pho more than ramen, honestly. It's better, you know?

**AD:** Yeah. And so do you imagine how like, the future changes. Do you think that there will be changes in the future taste? Like how people will prefer the food?

**TW:** Yeah, yeah, honestly, because, um I've actually been really pleasantly surprised in our restaurant. Um I don't– I don't know what my brother said because I mean, I'm up at the front so I get to see everybody's reaction from day one. So, honestly, when we first opened up in Bellaire, I kind of— I honestly kind of felt like people were kind of— I don't want to say against us, because I feel like that's too strong; but reluctant, I'll say reluctant. So I'll give you an example. So when we first opened up the first month, I noticed a lot of older people there, they would say stuff like, “Are you– are you sure that you know, opening bar, you know, your barbecue and there was a good idea?” And I was just thinking, “What kind of question is that?” Right? But there were like, you know, well, we have three barbecues, you know, really close by. And then

¹ Asian Food Network, [https://asianfoodnetwork.com/](https://asianfoodnetwork.com/)
there is there actually really is, there's two or three barbecues within three blocks. But the thing I noticed about the Bellaire area is, they're just fiercely loyal, which is a great thing, which is a great thing. So a lot of those people that-- that I'm giving you an example of, they-- they ended up being like, “Oh, wow, I love your barbecue.” But like I said, they were just very reluctant. They were like, “Man, you know, I hope your barbecues…” Those are the same people that said, “Man, I hope your barbecue is good, because you know, that barbecue down the block, they've been there 30 years is really good.” You know? Like I-- I don't want to say that I felt like they wanted us to fail, but-- but I that's-- that's why I use the word reluctant. Yeah, they I don't think that they felt like it was gonna be that good. That's that, I think that's what I really mean to say.

**AD**: So what was your thought process about that? Did you come up with any strategy to like help gain the customers?

**TW**: I'd love to say that we did honestly. Um, we're just really lucky. I used to be a party promoter before we were in the bar business. So I'm a more-- I'm a more um... What do you call it? Hands-on person to person. That's, that's, that's my type. I'm a people person. Right? And I think that helps, you know. So I went out a lot and met people.

But with the restaurant, I feel like we were really lucky because even though people were like, “Wow, you know, Blood Brothers just opened, the restaurant's only been open a month.” There's also a lot of people that kind of were like, “Yeah, well yeah, they just opened the restaurant; but they've been around a long time, because they're…” Because we did-- we-- we did events for, you know, five years, you know, once a month. So if you think about it from that aspect, you know, we've been around a while. So, what I mean by that, is that, that's why I think us opening where we were, you know, lucky; that we didn't really have to go out, and go crazy with advertising and marketing. I guess that's what I mean. Like I said, I'm, we're lucky Robbie's always stayed pretty active— very active on, you know, on-- on-- on social media, which these days you have to do. It's, you know, essential.

**AS**: Is that more effective than traditional advertising, you'd say?

**TW**: Uh I don't know about more important, but just as important, I would say. I don't know these days maybe more important, honestly. Because people are right here right now. Nowadays, especially young people. Older, you know, and that's another thing that you know, I'm glad you brought that up, you know. It's crazy to see a 75-year-old person, do you know doing this? [pretends to take a food selfie] No, I mean, you know, I expect to see young people doing that. But now old people do that. So that tells you the times now.
AS: How would you identify the demographics of your customers?

TW: Um, that's interesting too. I would say probably 40% is over 60 years old. And then the other 60% is you know, um 25 to 45. But a big portion is older and part of that— part of the reason is Bellaire has got a lot of older folks. It does.

AS: So then, 20-something-year-olds, they're the ones doing the Instagrammable experiences that help broadcast your food photos?


AS: So, going back to the question regarding food, what do you think of other kinds of fusions? For example, like a ramen burger? Have you tried that?

TW: I haven't tried it. To be honest with you, but our own. I don't know if that's a fair question for me, because I'm not really a ramen head. I do like ramen. I don't love ramen. Like I love pho, I love bun bo hue. I love beef noodle soup. Maybe it's because I haven't had a phenomenal bowl of ramen. If I did, then maybe I would think differently. But you know, I did have some pretty good ramen, in New York at Ippudo, it was, it was pretty good. But I mean, it was a life changing. Like, you know, like I really pho, like a good bowl of pho. Actually, I had it last night. I had pho, but.

AS: So has there been any ideas to expand or franchise or work with another?

TW: Um, not yet? Not yet. Yeah. Maybe in a few years we'll see.

AD: So, are there any like food cultures that you see are very potential, but are still not like widely recognized enough?

TW: Something that I would like to see more in Houston— because it's so hot, you know, nine months of the year. That's— that's kind of the reason why I think there's so many dessert places that can survive in Houston. But I wish there was like more, uh more of the— more of Vietnamese like dessert places, you know. Like Chè and all that stuff. I'm surprised there's not more in Houston. And then— and then— and then, same thing with the Chinese shaved ice. I think there should be more. I think they would do good.

AD: So you seem to be very interested in Vietnamese food… [TW: Oh yeah. I love Vietnamese food.] Yeah so was your friend Quy the one who brought it to you?
**TW:** Um, maybe a little bit. I mean, I-- I mean, we went to school with tons of Vietnamese people, so um, I have tons of Vietnamese friends and we, you know, all three of us love Vietnamese food. So. I've dated-- I've dated a few Vietnamese girls too. So...

**AD:** Yeah so as a business owner, do you have any advice for the future generations who are like interested in starting a business?

**TW:** Um yeah. Opening any business is-- is hard and stressful. And you got to put in a lot of hours. But restaurant is a different animal. It's definitely long hours. And you know, I guess depending on the size of the restaurant, I think the-- the thing that separates a restaurant maybe then-- then-- then a... I guess aconventional. If there's a--another conventional business is, I guess uh, being able to manage everybody's different duties, like in the kitchen, I think that's, you know. I mean of course I say that because I've never done a restaurant; but I think that was the biggest thing for me to get used to at the restaurant. Because if you-- if you're in the kitchen, and everybody has to like— I don't want to say, master their own duty or their own station; but it's just… what is the word I'm looking for? You just have to... communicate super well in the kitchen. Yeah, that's the-- I think that's what I mean.

**AD:** So in terms of like communication with your colleagues your partners, I would say, how would you describe the way that you communicate with your brother and your friend inside the kitchen, inside the restaurant?

**TW:** Well, I'm actually only in the kitchen one night a week. So, I mean, I can't really speak too much about being back in the kitchen, because I don't spend enough time back there. Um and mainly, that's because I don't want to mess up the flow. I mean, in all seriousness, because if it's super busy, and I mess, you know, and I mess, take away somebody's attention from something. It can be catastrophic in a restaurant, you know, that's why they call Back of House— the kitchen is Back of the House and the Front of the House is me, the floor. Because...

**AS:** How would...? Go ahead. [TW: No no no, it's fine.] So how would you describe the different management styles between you and your brother?

**TW:** Um well, in the kitchen there's a lot more people to deal with. So you know that's why the communication thing. So honestly I'm lucky I... you know, at least at our restaurant, the-- the way our restaurants situated, it's--it's a lot easier; because there's nobody and that I really have to worry about in the front except the cashier. Quy's cutting, but I mean they're-- they've got their own section. So that's, you know actually I have the least stress unless the phone is ringing off the hook, which sometimes it is and drives me crazy.

**AS:** Good business.
TW: Yeah, yeah, definitely. It's just something that comes with the territory. You gotta do it. You know, it's a good thing people are calling right? So.

AS: Oh I think it's the library, closing in half an hour.

TW: Oh okay.

AS: Um so are the other two restaurants barbecues, are they still in business?

TW: Yes, they are. Yeah.

AS: How would you say your status is comparing to the other two?

TW: I don't know. That's the thing. I don't know we've never been there before. I've never been there before. You know, um I can't speak for my brother, for Quy. But me honestly, we spend so much time at work. Like, we don't want to be around the restaurant. Like my favorite place, you know, whenever I'm off is Chinatown. You know, that's– you know, if we all cook a lot; um but, you know, before the whole, you know, Coronavirus stuff. I probably only go out to you once a week. You know, the rest of the time I cook. But the, you know, obviously in the last month, I've been going to Chinatown as much as possible. This is the most I think I've ever eaten in my life, like three or four times a week; because, you know, just trying to help out Chinatown. But yeah, that's it.

AD: How how would the restaurant decide what dish you should put on the menu? Like, do you have to try it out?

TW: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, we– we basically, we'll try it out together. If Quy has an idea about something or Robbie has an idea. They'll just mess around with it. And then we'll taste it. We'll let the rest of this staff taste it and give their honest opinion. If it doesn't have enough of something, or too much of this, too much of that. We even– we'll even give it to some of our hardcore regulars that come along. Because you know, they come so much, and we know they'll give us an honest opinion. And then we'll put it on the menu. You know if it– if it gets a good response, we keep it on the menu; if it doesn't take it off. And so far, you know, knock on wood, you know, been lucky. Almost all of them have stayed on the menu. The only I think the— yeah, the only thing we took off the menu was our Spam Musubi. Not because it wasn't good. I just think, you know, some things are just timing.

AS: What is that?
TW: You know what Spam is? Right, so, in Hawaii, they have a dish called Spam Musubi. It's spam, steamed rice, some people put an egg in it, and then wrapped with a seaweed with furikake seasoning on it. But spam isn't good for you. It's like has a lot of preservatives. So the spam thing that we made, we--we, it's made of, you know, real stuff, it's not bad for you. You know, but we call it that because it's you know, that's what they call it and Hawaii.

AS: So, I'm just curious. Is there a price that you would sell, like let a franchise buy out your restaurant?

TW: Oh, we haven't even thought about that yet. No idea. We haven't gotten that far.

AS: No franchise made any offers yet? [TW: Hm?] No franchise has made any offers yet?

TW: No, I don't think so.

AS: So what would be your advice to young restauraneers or entrepreneurs, um?

TW: Get as much experience in the restaurant as possible in all aspects of the business. Um buying the line in the kitchen. Um next to somebody with as much experience, just so you can—just so you can be a sponge you know, just be a sponge. That's the only way you learn stuff, you know, is repetition you know.

AS: And do you see your role being replaced by a robot in the foreseeable future?

TW: Uh I don't know could be, could be. Hope not but could be.

AS: And how do you see technology, like you brought up social media a lot, has changed the way that restaurants are playing in the field?

TW: Yeah, definitely. Um I mean, I—I—I guess, I guess that become, could become a factor with barbecue. You know, I think barbecue is a little bit more communal I guess, than a—than a normal restaurant. I don't know if I can say that or not. Um so I think people want the real people-to-people interaction. Yeah. Like something like ramen. I don't, you know. I hate to use just ramen as an example. But you know, I keep thinking about Japan and the little booth where they just eat. [AS: Ichiran Ramen?] Yeah. I guess we could do that at the barbecue. But...

AD: So do you feel that there's anything that we haven't covered? That is important to you?
TW: Hmm.

AS: Do you want to talk about Quy or...?

TW: Sure, sure. Or my parents. Yeah yeah um… I feel like our parents were definitely a huge, huge help to the restaurant. Obviously Quy's parents too. I mean, both of our parents still work. They have not retired. They're workaholics. Um Quy's parents are… um let's see. My mom is 74. I think Quy's— I think Quy's parents are at least three years, three or four years older than my– than my parents. They still work six days a week. Um they do jewelry. But uh yeah, they– they definitely deserve credit for the restaurant too, because they were supportive from day one. You know both of our families. So, um my stepdad I don't know— if my brother brought it up or not— but my stepdad literally handled all the furniture in the restaurant. He has some property in Giddings, which is like kind of in between here and Austin. And he– he literally, um, took the trees out of the ground, cut it into pieces, and made our furniture— tables, all the wood chairs in the restaurant. So that's uh, you know, he took a few years doing it. So he did a lot of work, a lot of work. So they deserve a lot of credit.

AS: That’s incredible!

TW: Yeah. So when y'all come to the restaurant, you can see.

AS & AD: Yeah definitely.

AS: So have you tried “Beyond Meat” which is...?

TW: I haven't. I haven't. I'm not— you know I'm not against doing it. I just haven't had a chance to do it. I'm too– too busy eating pho. [All laugh]

AS: Is there any fusion between other cuisines— that you mentioned, like you said, you liked Iranian food, Indian food— that you can possibly bring into your menu?

TW: I mean I think that, there's definitely other other stuff that will go good with barbecue. I mean, there's definitely stuff that I don't think will work a barbecue too. Because not everything tastes good smoked. Like for example, our friend Kaiser who has a restaurant called “Himalaya”. He's done some stuff that uh, with barbecue, with– with smoked meat that's really good. So, I think also “Ramen Tatsuya” in Montrose, so I think they've done some– some stuff with barbecue too. And we've done– we've done a few, at least one or two collaborations with– with a ramen place too, with “Tiger Den”. So I mean there's definitely so. And then there's a kind of a
new movement right now in Texas where they do a barbecue with the kind of Mexican—with a Mexican twist, you know?

AS: Uh your brother mentioned this film you guys are doing, the cook show. [TW: Yes, yes.] Are you involved with that?

TW: Yes, yes. Yeah, that actually already passed. Yeah, we haven't put it on social media because they said not tell anybody. [All laugh] But yeah. It's gonna be— it's gonna be on, I think, in summer they said. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, even there's some dishes that Robbie is working on, that we haven't put on the menu yet. Um I think it was Brisket– Brisket Chow Fun, it was pretty good.

AS: Yeah yeah, he mentioned that.

TW: Yeah, that one was really good. And there's a few sausages that we're gonna work on next. Some Korean one. And some like Thai Lao, you know. We— when we might even mess around and try and do a Nam. Maybe, we'll see. There's some flavors that you know we don't mess with because, you know, people may not be ready for it. [laughs] But I don't know. Some of them some of our clientele surprise me sometimes. They really do. Sometimes they'll be like, “No, they're not gonna like this.” And they like it. I'm like, “Wow. I'm shocked.”

AS: Like what? For example.

TW: Like sometimes when I mentioned the– the– the sour, the sour, Thai sausage. Like, I don't really know any non-Asian people that like that, you know; and then when I mentioned it, I still remember mentioning it to one of our regulars and he said, “Oh, man, I love that.” I was like, “What? Really?” I was just surprised. I was surprised.

AS: So when The New York Times and you got The Smithsonian, when they came in, did you know that they were the food critics?

TW: Um, no. Uh...

AS: And you were there right?

TW: Yeah, I was there. The Smithsonian one if I remember right, they were— they were suggested, or we were suggested, us to Smithsonian from somebody at GQ, I think, as a story. Something like that. Um honestly, most of these they contact Robbie because he had a… he—
he's the one that answers the the main web email. So he's the one that usually got all these, you know, email inquiries.

**AS:** Having dealt with some new customers, did you have a sense, like a customer is coming as a critic or just regular...?

**TW:** Um there's a few that you can tell; honestly most of them I couldn't tell. Except for the-- the one that the famous ones, where you know their face. Like when the “Texas Monthly” guy came that we saw, and we all– we got really nervous; but like luckily he liked it. So, and he was really nice. So that was fun. That was fun.

**AS:** Would you be willing to share any like crisis experience, for example, bad reviews? If you had any of them.

**TW:** Yeah, yeah. Um, let me see… there was a lady who left a crazy review. I can't remember what it was though. It was… Oh, I know what it was. Yeah. So it was this lady that obviously had like a– like a crazy fake profile obviously. I think she put, “What kind of—” She put, “What kind of business is this if they run out of food by three o'clock?” And uh, so basically, she just— she left a real long review, you know, saying that, you know—we don't, we're “not a real restaurant”; if we were “a real restaurant”, we wouldn't close at three, basically. And she just, she just kept reviewing that, just over and over for like a month. And um, and the funny thing is– is, it was obvious that it was just somebody that was just hating. It was basically, uh it was obvious that she never tried to come. You know, do you know what I mean? She would put, “Yeah, oh I went there” at such and such time and, you know, they were there— you know, they were sold out. And we pay attention to our social media, we're like, “She wasn't here! What is she talking about?” So it's you know, just basically, you know, false, just made up. So eventually it stopped. But it... Yeah, I mean, that's what comes to mind. Um...

**AS:** Did you guys do anything?

**TW:** No, no.

**AS:** You can't take out reviews that are fake?

**TW:** Well, yeah, no, yeah, we didn't, you know. We didn't do anything about it. Um, there was another older lady. I mean, this wasn't a review, but there was an older lady that complained about our sausage being raw, um, which is totally impossible. Because the process of doing sausage, it's cooked twice; it's not raw. [chuckles] You know. We attempted everything you know, before it comes into... and it's not raw. That's all I'm saying, “It's not raw.” But, you know,
AD: I guess those are very interesting stories with running your restaurant. [chuckles]

TW: Yeah, yeah.

AS: Thank you so much for your time. As much as we want to...

TW: Sure sure. Yeah, I mean, I hope it was helpful. I mean...

AS & AD: Yeah definitely.

TW: We've never run a restaurant before. So I mean we're not experts literally on anything. We're beginners.

AS: Yeah, it's really inspiring stories.

TW: Thank you. Thank you.

[Interview Ends.]