

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with Martha Howard by David Smith
Conducted on July 1st, 2023 in Monticello, GA

[00:00:00] **LuAnna Nesbitt:** The following interview is a part of the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. It was conducted in Monticello, Georgia by interviewer David Smith on July 1st, 2023. The narrator of this oral history is Martha Howard.

[00:00:11] **David Smith:** If you could, start by introducing yourself and tell us anything important about yourself.

[00:00:16] **Martha Howard:** My name is Martha Howard. I was born and raised here in Monticello. I left in 1972. And I lived in Atlanta for about 40 years, and now I live in Conyers. And ain't no whole lot of stuff about, about me to tell. I have two children, both are grown. I have six grandchildren, all are grown. And they all live in Conyers.

[00:00:43] **David Smith:** And I come back here to Monticello regular, but I never live, can't make it to live anymore out by there Tell me about your memories from childhood.

[00:00:53] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, I had a lot, a lot of things. I remember a lot of things that my mother did and taught us. Things that, you know, we did. You know, like when you have a baby, when the baby's teething, you take a can of vegetables, pour the vegetables out, open the can lid, all the way to, almost to the end, and then you bend it back, and you put an egg in it, and you put it over the door when the child is asleep. And then you won't have no problem with the child when it's teething.

He won't have fever, won't sweat, and won't do none of that. And, that was one thing my mother did, and that works, and it works today. It does. In Jesus name.

[00:01:28] **David Smith:** Did with your children?

[00:01:29] **Martha Howard:** I did. My children did with they children. Yeah, yeah, that works. Mm hmm. Yeah.

[00:01:35] **David Smith:** Are there any other, like practices like that, that you continue to do?

[00:01:42] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, well, when we were always taught, like, when the storm come, we had to always sit. We always, I don't care, even when we got grown, we had to quit doing whatever we doing, and everybody got to sit down, and we're going to be quiet.

We're not going to look at TV, we're not going to answer the phone, we're not going to do that. This is going to be a time that we're going to have quiet time, and everybody is going to do it. And we knew, and we knew to do it. Mm hmm. Yeah, some things I have to think about, I remember things later like I remember today.

My, my, my daddy used to call up the cows and stuff, you know, he would just go out there and go to hollering and then you're like, you see amazing. They'll come walking up. They just come walking up. Yeah, just think that they're not gonna hear that, but they would, you know, I have to think it's been a long time. It's been a long time.

Like I said, I didn't live here. So after I left, see, I didn't continue to deal with no farming stuff. And my sister kept to my seeds and all that. I didn't do none of that. When I, when I became an adult, I didn't, I didn't do that. And we're probably back in the last. Probably in the last 10 years, I started doing, like, selling stuff and making preserves and jams.

Because when I got grown, like I said, I left. So I didn't ever come back to do none of that. I would come to visit, but as far as coming back, working on a farm and doing that, I never did no more of that after that.

[00:02:56] **David Smith:** What made you decide to come back and try to start selling stuff and growing again?

[00:02:59] **Martha Howard:** Well, my sister showed us how to make the pies. And then once we started doing that, then we saw how well that worked. And then my other sister did it first. And then I learned how to do it. And then I started doing it. Cause I make different things than what she make. See, I sell a lot of pickled stuff. She sell preserves and jam. I sell pickles. I sell pickled squash. Pickled okra. Dill pickle. Bread and butter. Pickled peach. I sell a lot of pickled stuff. Where she just sell mostly, um, preserves. But I sell, I sell other stuff.

[00:03:31] **David Smith:** Where did you learn how to, or, yeah. Where did you learn how to pickle things or preserve things?

[00:03:38] **Martha Howard:** From my sister, that one that's talking. She taught us basically some of the stuff that my mother did. She remember, I remember the stuff like she's talking about. My mother used to quilt. I remember that but I never done that. So, uh, we did it when we was little 'cause we had to help her with it. But, uh, since I've been grown, I never done no, no quilting. I didn't want to do that. . And like I said, I didn't wanna do no farming, but the preserving I did.

And I, like I said, I started, once I started doing it, then I started learning other ways to do things myself, because she never taught me nothing about the pickling. . I learned that along the way. And a lot of times when you go out to sell stuff, people would tell you stuff. Mm. They would tell you stuff from they parents. They see stuff you have, who ain't seen this in years, and then they will tell you how their parents made it. Sometimes people write down recipes and bring it to you. And say, wait, my mother used to make this, and this is how she made it. So a lot of that I do. I still do now. And like I said, people buy it.

[00:04:30] **David Smith:** Um, are there any, do you have like particular recipes that you use for pickling that you've developed on your own.

[00:04:37] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, okay. Yeah, I do, there's some of the pickling I do and like I said, I sell pickled peaches. Most people don't sell that. Well, I didn't develop that on my own. My mother's, you know, did that so I learned that from her but uh.

[00:04:50] **David Smith:** Yeah, I've never had a pickled peach. What does that taste like?

[00:04:53] **Martha Howard:** It's good. It is. I don't have any with me. It's not I don't know if, like I said, I'm not going to be able to come down here next week, I'm just going to see how things are. Well, I might get a chance to send something down here so you can see.

So we do pickle, yeah, peaches. It's just a regular peach, most of the time it's whole or cut in half. And then you cook it in this sauce that you make up that I'm not going to tell you. Okay, okay. And then you put it in the jar, and it's real good. Because most people say, oh, I haven't seen none of that since my mother did that when, you know, when we was younger.

Mm hmm.

[00:05:25] **David Smith:** Uh, are you going to share those recipes with your children though?

[00:05:28] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, my children are not really interested in this. Like those pies and stuff, they don't eat that. Just like Sister Mary said, certain things these young folks done got away from. They don't, they don't eat a whole lot of that. Some of them, like when I go out in to sell, now they, they'll go with me. You know, so they know that part of it. And as far as just preparing it, they don't. No, they don't. And a lot of things I do, I have it wrote down. You know, I have things wrote down, like I, like our pickled okra. So this lady told me, she said, you ought to start selling pickled okra. And, uh, she brought me the recipe.

And, uh, And I sold it and it worked well. And I shared it with this other lady. Now she sells a lot of it. Yeah, yeah she does. But I had that recipe wrote down. Something like pickle, bread and butter. I had those things wrote down, you know, somebody would, you know, want to use them later.

[00:06:17] **David Smith:** Now, uh, obviously you don't have to do anything you don't want to, but if you want to attach, like, recipes or any documents you have recording your process or a history of a recipe, feel free to send those my way. We can store those, you know, safely as well. Um, because that's really valuable too, so that people can learn about that. Um, let me ask you, what kind of things do you think are best to pickle for taste and maybe for health?

[00:06:50] **Martha Howard:** Um, I think it's probably a cucumber. A lot of people ask me for that. Sometimes people ask me to just fix them the juice part. They don't even want the cucumber. They just want the liquid from it. And they drink it for some kind of health reason. Yeah. It's the cucumber. The dill pickle cucumber. It's the liquid that they want. The liquid that I make from that, they want that.

[00:07:13] **David Smith:** And what's your personal favorite?

[00:07:15] **Martha Howard:** I like pickle peaches.

[00:07:17] **David Smith:** Pickle peaches, that's your favorite.

[00:07:18] **Martha Howard:** And bread and butter pickles, I like them too. But that's about it. I, I really don't like pickles, but I like, I like them when I do that to them. Like bread and butter pickle, I like those. I don't really like cucumbers, but I, I, I eat those. But when I put the bread and butter sauce on them, I love those.

[00:07:35] **David Smith:** Is everything that you pickle from this farm?

[00:07:37] **Martha Howard:** Some of it.

[00:07:39] **David Smith:** Do you grow elsewhere as well?

[00:07:40] **Martha Howard:** No, we have a friend that has a farm we get things from. Same place, but we finna go get these beets. But they grow them. They grow them. Mmm, yeah.

[00:07:49] **David Smith:** Um, does it taste different when you get stuff from the store and pickle it?

[00:07:54] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, it's gonna be something different. It is, it's gonna be something different. But you, if you have to be like, I know the difference. And then some people, some people like me, like I say, tell you about it, they know the difference. Cause a lot of the people that I sell to, they still do stuff. So they, they know what it tastes like and stuff. Some people know and some don't.

[00:08:13] **David Smith:** I would love to hear a story about your first time trying pickled peaches.

[00:08:18] **Martha Howard:** Well, I already knew how to, how to make it. Like I said, cause my mother used to make it.

[00:08:21] **David Smith:** No, but I mean like eating it, like what, like,

[00:08:23] **Martha Howard:** Oh, that was when I, Oh, that was young! That would have been young when I first ate that. But it was always good. It kind of got a unique taste. So you'll kind of remember that. But I used to like to eat that with vegetables. And uh, sometimes you just eat it out of the jar. But I can't tell you exactly when it was. Like I said, that's been a long time. My mother always made that. Ever since I can remember. I can't really remember that first time I had that.

[00:08:50] **David Smith:** What kind of vegetables would you eat it with?

[00:08:53] **Martha Howard:** Vegetables. Collard green, peas.

[00:08:55] **David Smith:** Anything.

[00:08:55] **Martha Howard:** Yeah.

[00:08:56] **David Smith:** Oh, okay.

[00:08:56] **Martha Howard:** Mm hmm. And then some people just eat it out of its jar. Like when I, when I sell it now, people tell me they just eat it.

[00:09:01] **David Smith:** They just eat it, yeah?

[00:09:02] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, they just, yeah, they just eat it. Like I said, cause it got a unique taste. And they just eat it. Mm hmm.

[00:09:07] **David Smith:** Are there any things that you, you know, participate in growing or that you pickle or can or preserve, that you feel connects you back to your family or your heritage?

[00:09:24] **Martha Howard:** Well, all of it do, but I, like I said, I don't participate on growing now. That part I don't do. I don't, not now. The stuff that I sell, I don't participate anymore.

[00:09:32] **David Smith:** Well, I mean, you pick it .

[00:09:33] **Martha Howard:** Yeah. Yeah. Some of it, like, I pickled some squash. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I pickled up some squash last week. Well, my brother done picked them, and, but I pickled them.

They gave 'em to me. And I pickeled them. Mm-hmm . And, uh, cucumbers. They, they gimme some of those. I pickle those and, uh, some things. But, um. Cucumbers I get from them, and I pickle those. Okra. When they have okra, I pickle okra. Okra, yeah.

[00:09:59] **David Smith:** Alright, um, is there any words of wisdom that you have to someone that's getting into either farming or preserving or pickling for the first time? What's your advice to them?

[00:10:12] **Martha Howard:** Okay, like I said, like you said, you need to get farm grown vegetables if you can. That'll be the first thing, because like you said, it's going to taste different. It's going to look different, and everything it is. And, uh, what I always do before I cook stuff, I always pray over stuff. I ask God to bless it. Before I even cook, I want to bless how it look, bless how it taste, bless how it smell, I'll do it, and bless me to sell it. And most of the time, it does. He does that.

Mm hmm.

[00:10:39] **David Smith:** I tell ya, I've talked to all sorts of people, uh, from all sorts of different backgrounds, and even if they're not, you know, they don't have a relationship with God like that, they always have something like that where they talk to their food, they talk to their plants. And they, they put a blessing on them.

[00:10:55] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, yeah it does. Yeah, because yeah, God, God owns everything. So you have to pray about everything. So, and that's not excluded. And most of the time I do. I pray about things, cooking, pies, preserving. I ask God to bless it. And he does. Mm hmm. Yeah.

And then when you, if you start to start out doing this, sometimes the process is not always fast. When I, when I first started selling vegetables and pies and stuff, it was real slow for me. It was real slow. Sometime I would make it and go sell, and sometime I would sell, sometime I wouldn't. But I didn't never stop going. You know, I didn't never stop going because I wasn't selling or making a whole lot of money.

But now when I go, it's much different. So, once you start, you have to be willing to keep going. You can't start just because you don't make a whole lot of money. Then you just quit. You won't, you won't succeed that way. Because sometimes, like I said, with the customers and stuff I have, I have to build up to them.

You know, and like now, they'll be looking for me. Yeah, when I don't go, yeah, they'll be looking for me. I came looking for you. Yeah, they'll be, they'll be looking for you.

[00:11:56] **David Smith:** Well, shoot we're at the market today and people were clamoring over there.

[00:11:59] **Martha Howard:** Those pies. Yeah.

[00:12:00] **David Smith:** I had a pie this morning It was so so good. Tell me more about the pie. Is that something you also had growing up? Or is that something

[00:12:07] **Martha Howard:** My mother made those when we were children and then Somebody, cause we had quit doing it. We had, we didn't do that anymore. And then my sister passed about two weeks ago. She worked at Agnes

Scott for about 40, 42 years I believe and during her time there some lady showed her another way to do it, to fry, to fry the pies.

Uh, and then she showed my sister and we started doing it. She showed us how to do it and it worked. Yeah. And it worked. Yeah. We, I remember having pies when my mother was. When we was children, real small children, my mother used to make them, but then we had got away from it. And then once that lady showed my sister and she showed us, then we started selling them.

It was basically the same thing that we had, that our mother had did, but we just had got away from it. Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

[00:12:51] **David Smith:** Man, I, um, I'm sad I didn't get to meet your sister that recently passed because that was just really one of the best things I've eaten in a long time.

[00:12:58] **Martha Howard:** Oh, okay. Yeah, my sister had a mind to experiment with food. With everything she cooked, she tried and see what, you know, what it tasted like, what would make it different. Now, she did a lot of things. She would, you know, she would pickle stuff. She would pickle anything. Collard greens, she made some collard green, uh, chowchow. She made some collard green dip. It was real good.

You know, I had never heard of that before, but she, you know, when people use spinach, she used collard green. And it was just amazing how, when she, uh. When she prepared it. After she quit working at school, she would cook something every day. Like I said, she would experiment with things and she would share those things that she experimented with you because she wanted you to do it, you to try it.

And, uh, there's a lot of it. One person learn and share it with the other. Okay, then we'll show you how to do this and how to do that. And that's how it continued to go on.

[00:13:47] **David Smith:** Um, if you don't mind sharing, what's the process of making those pies?

[00:13:52] **Martha Howard:** Okay, you gotta make the dough. Usually, this is how I make mine. You have to make the dough, because we make the dough. You know, a lot of people use cans, biscuits, and all that, but we actually make the dough from scratch. So when we make the dough, usually I make the dough,

and then I freeze it. And then, I gotta make it into, gotta roll it. You have to roll it out. And make it into the little pat, I mean little squares about just so big.

And then once you do that, then you put the filling on the inside. Which is Apple, peach, sometimes sweet potato, sometimes strawberry, whatever fruit you decide, blackberry, blueberry, whatever fruit you decide. And then you put it in between and you fold it, and once you fold it, you take a fork and you mash it all the way around the edge to seal it.

And once you seal it, then you fry it.

[00:14:37] **David Smith:** And I see the deep fry right there, but when you were children, like what did your mom.

[00:14:42] **Martha Howard:** Cooked it on the stove. Yeah, she cooked hers on the stove. So, I cook fried pies, I cook them on the, uh, in a, big frying pan in the stove too. Sometimes I have a small, uh, little deep fryer I use, but I don't ever cook outside.

[00:14:57] **David Smith:** Um, were there any, are there any other dishes that, that your sister taught you how to make or that you guys share?

[00:15:04] **Martha Howard:** Well, my mother taught us how to make barnwood stew. Yeah, we make, we make that. My brother and I make that. Well, we all make that. And you know, when we make that, we seal that real good.

Real, real good. Yeah, and she taught us that. And it's made from a mixture of stuff. We make it like from chicken, pig ears, tomato soup, corn, onions. It's like a big soup, like, but it tastes different.

[00:15:25] **David Smith:** Mhm.

[00:15:26] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, and like I said, we always sell a lot of that. And if we sell that, then we sell a lot of that. And it all came back from what she did. My mother made that.

[00:15:38] **David Smith:** Alright, uh, well then, any final words that you want to put on the record? Wisdom you want to share for people who are trying to learn about what you do?

[00:15:46] **Martha Howard:** Yeah, like I said, you gotta have some patience. Yeah. You gotta have some patience. And I suggest you pray too. And ask God to lead you and guide you where to go and what to do and when and how to do it. And then I believe that's the key right there. It's, it's, it's that, because you need wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. And a lot of times, I listen to the things that people tell me.

When I be out selling, people tell, like I said, they tell me all kinds of stuff. And then sometimes they be show me. And sometimes they bring me something, they show me what it tastes like, and I'll have an open mind to what other folks do and except that, you know, somebody made me know how to do this better than me and be willing to try different things and have a mind to listen because you can learn a lot and that way more people don't learn because they, a lot of people, they already know.

I don't know nothing. Some things I know nothing about. Being honest, I don't. And like I said, something I learned, I learned something from my mother as a child. Just like coin roll. I know how to do that. I learned it from my mother. My sister don't know how to do that. But I learned it from my mother. So I still know, you know, how to do that.

Sometime my mother made a real good sweet potato pie. I know how to make that. I know how to make it different from what they make it. Because she showed me how she did it. Like she said, my mother cooked by taste. Not by no measurement. Now she said, you taste it, if it tastes good to you, then it's gonna taste good to somebody else. But if it don't taste good to you, it's not gonna be good to them.

So if you don't have enough of this, or you have too much of that, causing it not to taste the way that it should. So you always learn how to taste what you cook yourself. So you'll know. Like I said, I want it to look good. Cause most of the time, people gonna buy food with their eyes.

Cause if they walk up here and it don't look good, you either, me either. I walk up here and see that and it don't look good, I'm not gonna want that. So I always want it to look good as well as taste good. I do. And most of the time, you know it does. And then you have to talk your stuff up. Yeah, you have to stand behind your stuff.

And I, you know, I tell people, they say, Well, I know you gonna say that. Well, what you expect me to say? Yeah, this is gonna be good. I tell them, this is gonna be good. You'll see when you eat, it's gonna be good. So you always talk

good about it, even though you don't, um, always sell it to them, but you always stand behind what you're doing.

If you're willing to do this, then you have to stand up for it. This is gonna be good. You'll see, I, you always tell people. And you gotta have an open mind and attitude to deal with people, like I say, to be able to hear. Somebody can tell you something and you can be able to hear, even though I do this.

Like I said, people show me all kinds of ways. See, I don't go talking about, ah, well I know, and my mama did this. You show me a new way, I want to see what you're saying. I want to see, like my mama never did no pickling. Nah, I mean, no, yeah, all that. She would do cucumber, but she did that totally in a different manner than what I do.

Mm hmm. Yep. Yep, that's about it.

[00:18:27] **David Smith:** All right. Thank you so very much.

[00:18:29] **Martha Howard:** Okay.