

Interviewee: Nix, Danton

Interview Date: September 30, 2010

HIST 6384: Oral History  
Fall 2010

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

### *A Taste of Houston*

A Part of the Culinary Crossroads Project  
UH Center for Public History

Interviewee: Danton Nix

Interview Date: September 30, 2010

Place: Danton's Gulf Seafood Kitchen

Interviewer: Kyle Goyette

Transcriber: Kyle Goyette

Keywords: Gulf Coast, Seafood, BP Oil Spill, Houston cuisine, Restaurant Ownership, Houston Tourism

#### Abstract:

Danton Nix was interviewed on September 30, 2010, at Danton's Gulf Coast Seafood Kitchen, 4611 Montrose Blvd., Houston, TX 77006. The interview was conducted by Kyle Goyette on behalf of the Oral History of Houston Project, Center for Public History, University of Houston. The interview is available at M.D. Anderson Library on the main campus of the university. The interview explores such issues as how Mr. Nix came to open his restaurant in Houston, his past career as a chef, what kind of relationship he has with the city and its tourism board, and how recent events such as the BP Gulf Oil Spill have affected him and his day-to-day business. Many Houston-area businesses experienced a downturn following the media coverage of the spill, which caused many consumers to be reluctant to eat seafood that might possibly be contaminated or unhealthy. Mr. Nix explores how such thinking affects his role as a business owner and chef.

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton****Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

KG: Alright, this is Kyle Goyette speaking with Mr. Danton Nix at Danton's Restaurant in Houston, Texas. Mr. Nix, before we begin would mind please just stating your full name?

DN: My name is Danton Lee Nix. Birthday of 12/6/1958.

KG: Thank you, sir. And, how long have you lived in Houston?

DN: Most of my life. I've spend some time in Austin, a little bit of time in Galveston.

KG: Okay, so most of your life. And, what has caused you to stay in Houston for so long to operate a restaurant here?

DN: Well, this is where I got started in the restaurant business and where I kind of established my name. And, it was just one job just kind of led into another. So, just opportunity I would say. And the fact that Houston is such, is so open to...it's one of the greatest restaurant cities in the United States at this point. There's just a lot going on. There's a lot of growth. It was an exciting place to be.

KG: And what caused you to get into the restaurant industry in the first place?

DN: Well, I was a land man. Back in the early 80s. And it started tanking. And, had an opportunity, I met a man named Jim Goode and he and I became friends, and he offered me a job. And, so this just kind of went from there. And I was very fortunate to run into someone of his quality right off the bat.

KG: And where was that first job that Mr. Goode...?

DN: First thing I did was run his barbecue place. And, then, I ran his taqueria at the same time, Tootoo, and then I opened his Goode Company Seafood.

KG: And where did you work following your stint with the Goode Company?

DN: I went to work for the Landry Group. Went to work at Willie G's initially, and this was right when the buyout was going on. And, there's a long story of the fallout of the Landry Group. So, I ended up working for a guy named Tillman Fertitta when he was first getting started, and helped get his company established.

KG: And what prompted you to open your own restaurant after all the years of working with those companies?

DN: It had always been in the back of my mind. Number one, I prefer to work for myself. I have a little problem with authority, and like to do my own deal. So, I just...it just kind of... it eventually made sense. I had an opportunity to buy a restaurant called Joyce's Oyster Resort over on San Felipe and Winrock that was really just sitting there. It was fully equipped, but they had no customers. So, I thought "well, heck I'll...let me have it." So, that's where that got

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton****Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

started as far as the ownership. I also started in part of the group that did Joe's Crab Shack and owned a piece of that, which I promptly got screwed out of. But, so that was an interesting experience also...being apart of something that grew that fast and furious.

KG: So, tell me about opening your first restaurant. What was the experience like? What do you remember most about it and what was it like for you?

DN: For me, what I remember most is the excitement. I was in my mid-twenties at the time so I was very young, had a lot of energy, like I said, and was working for somebody who was a very interesting character and whose food was fantastic! I liked the fact that the workload was so heavy. I liked doing something that I thought a lot of other people couldn't do...that just couldn't physically and emotionally handle what it takes. So, I kind of got hooked into it. I call it "the sickness," and I've still got it and can't get it out. But, I like the excitement of it and I enjoy working with people and I obviously love food. In my first stint in the restaurant business when I was working for Jim Goode I was not cooking, I was not creating for him. I was just his General Manager. So, at that point it was just, you know, customers and people. But, you know, it was fast and furious. We opened that thing and we were doing 60,000 the first week out, so it was, you know, crazy. And, I was fortunate enough to go steal an entire staff from another restaurant that really kind of saved my life. So, a lot of good relationships and, I just, it became something that I thought was really, really fascinating.

KG: Was anyone in particular that you had worked with before instrumental in helping you open your own establishment? Or was it really just you and your drive to succeed?

DN: It was really just me. I have not had a lot of mentors, I haven't really worked for any other chefs. I'm a self-taught cook, so most of it has been self-driven.

KG: That was my next question. You said you were a self-taught cook, did you go to culinary school?

DN: No, I have not, never spent a day.

KG: Have you ever wanted to?

DN: Yes, had I had the opportunity when I was young and had the money to go somewhere good, C.I.A. or something like that, possibly yes. But, you know, when I was growing up, especially in Houston, Texas, there weren't a lot of restaurants, we didn't know about culinary schools. It just really wasn't in my realm of knowledge.

KG: So, do you think being a self-taught chef hurt you, helped you, in establishing your own place and coming up with your own recipes? What effect do you think being self-taught had?

DN: Well, that's a very interesting question. I think for me it's probably helped me because I don't have any limitations and I wasn't told to do it a certain way..."you've got to do it this way." So, everything is still in my mind even though I've been cooking for 30 years. It's still

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton**

**Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

pretty wide open. And it's really whatever I think I can do and you get back there and you pull it off. I primarily learn by burning stuff and screwing it up, so you just got back and do it over and over and over again.

KG: So, trial by error was a big aspect of that?

DN: It still is.

KG: You've won many awards for the foods in your restaurant, most notably my personal favorite the Crab Danton...

DN: Thank you.

KG: ...how do you think up recipes? Do you just try ingredients or how does that work for you?

DN: Usually I try ingredients. It's funny, my ideas come from magazine articles, they come from conversations like we're having, I'll just see something. I don't really have a formula and it's really...to how it comes...something will just pop in my mind and if it stays in there a couple of days I usually end up trying it. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

KG: How do you manage the dual role of being both the owner and the chef?

DN: It's kind of a natural for me. Even when I was...before being an owner, I liked to take control of a restaurant and I liked to do all of it. I have a very strong work ethic, I enjoy working hard, I enjoy a challenge more than anything else, which is probably why I have been in the restaurant business this long, because it is challenging on a daily basis.

KG: How has the experience of owning your own restaurant been in general, ups and downs-wise?

DN: Some days it's great and some days it's not. I call it "living the dream" and sometimes I mean it and sometimes I'm being quite facetious. But, you know, there's something to be said for someone else writing you a paycheck every two weeks and not having all the headaches. Would I trade it or change it? No, not necessarily, but it's a hard, hard dollar to make in the restaurant business. It is brutal, I get a lot of young kids because, you know, TV is all over the place, both food and everybody is in love with it and everybody wants to get into it and I'm like "well, if you don't like weekends and if you don't like working on your birthdays and all these other problems, and if you can't put in 80 hours a week, you know, you need to go somewhere else." It's not as glamorous as it appears. There are so many different things that you are trying to get to happen at one time and coordinate.

KG: What other advice like that would you give to someone who is thinking of either going into a restaurant as a chef or as a proprietor? What other advice would you give that person?

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton****Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

DN: I would tell them that the first thing to do is go into a busy restaurant and get a job. And, preferably start low. There are no glamour jobs. So, it's like I tell my employees and I try to treat everybody very, very well. The dishwasher is just as important as I am. And you need to go in...somebody...before you go lay down \$40,000 for culinary school, which, there are a lot even in Houston where you have to pay that much, you need to go work in an actual restaurant and make sure that that's really what you want to do. Number one, \$40,000 is a lot of money. Number two, people that come out of culinary school with no experience, I won't hire them. I won't touch them because they've got stars in their eyes and they want to go to the top immediately, and they don't really want to work, and they haven't ever worked. You know, it's hard. You mentally have to realize that your body...you can push your body further than it can, and you've got to be very focused and there's just a lot of stuff going on.

KG: So, you encourage people to be realistic about the whole experience?

DN: Absolutely.

KG: One of the things that you mentioned was that you constantly have to be going and going when you own a restaurant, and, with Houston in particular, the gulf seafood competition is very, very deep...

DN: Absolutely.

KG: ...how do you keep current with your competition and surpass them?

DN: Well, I keep my eye on my competition without a doubt. I don't compare myself to them for several reasons, I don't have enough time to go out and eat in their restaurants and check it out, and I really like to focus on what I do, and, I've realized that I'm not a...I'm a self-taught cook and there's great value in that. But, I try and, you know, just learn to do what I can do. And, as far as keeping up with somebody else doesn't...or worrying about somebody else really tends, for me, to take away from what I need to be focusing on. Because, everyday I need to be focused on coming up with new stuff, I've got to be buying products, I've got to deal with customers, I've got to deal with employees, it just goes on and on. So, I really just try and put my head down and focus on what I do. And, if there's something really cool going on in town I'll eventually hear about it.

KG: So, you don't make a point to go, necessarily, try other restaurants mostly for time...

DN: Right.

KG: ..but, is Houston known to be a city that there's a lot of recipe stealing going on? Anything like that...restaurants stealing from each other...does anything like that ever go on?

DN: You know, I hear a lot of it and a lot of people try and do it. Typically what it'll be is usually somebody who doesn't know what to do with that recipe and really doesn't have anywhere to go with it. I've got a couple key recipes like that white garlic remoulade on the

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton****Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

Crab Danton and people have stolen it, tried to use it other places. They just don't...either they don't understand how it works or how to make it. There's a specific way you do everything to come out with a certain flavor. You can't just throw things together. You've got to layer them, you've got to put them in at certain times, and you've got to have some passion about it. And that's one thing that a lot of people don't have. If your heart's not in it your food ends up tasting...it's very much a representation of who you are and where you are emotionally and where your head is.

KG: You mentioned earlier that operating a restaurant in a city like Houston, you said is a great experience because it's a good city. What is different about operating a restaurant in Houston as opposed to another large city possibly, like Dallas or Los Angeles? What is different about Houston?

DN: I think, one thing about Houston is people are very open to anything that they have going on. There's not a lot of preset ideas, you don't have to be a five star restaurant, you don't have to be a trained chef. I mean, people are...if they're willing to walk in the door and if you treat them right and you give them a great product, they're very receptive to it. So, there's not a lot of preconceived ideas in Houston, per se. I mean, it's still just a wide-open city. You can still come here and if you can work hard, and you can do the best that you can do, you got an opportunity. Now, a lot of other cities...Chicago...some of these older cities...they're a little more controlled and close and it's hard to get your foot in there, and you better have a name, and you better have gone to school somewhere good, and you better look pretty in your whites and the whole bit.

KG: As a restaurant owner, what has been your relationship with city officials, tourism bureaus? Are they active in promoting local restaurants?

DN: They say they are. My experience has been, they're active in taking my money to be in the convention bureau this, that, and the other. So, I can't say that they do a great job for me. I'm not saying they don't for everybody, but, I think that they're a money-making entity in themselves. And, so, they're like me, trying to survive. And they don't have a vested interest in helping me. You know, they do put out a few manuals, a few books that they hand out to conventioners and stuff like that, but, that's not something that people typically...you don't get a big pull out of that.

KG: Do you think that's a common trend across all restaurants or do you think that's just city specific or industry specific?

DN: I can only speak for my own experience. I think, especially being an independent, I don't have a big pull. Now, there's big chains, Pappas, all these other guys, they're gonna get the play, they're gonna get the juice. It's just the way the world works.

KG: And they're based in Houston also.



**Interviewee: Nix, Danton****Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

DN: Right. And they've got the money to throw around and to grease the palms...the correct ones...to make things happen. You know, I don't. They're people are very nice to me and my partner when they come in here and they want us to sign a check and get in there, and promise all this stuff that doesn't happen. Then we don't see them once that check clears...it's history.

KG: So, in a city like Houston, where you are an independent, you're not part of a chain, a larger corporation, how do you stay current as an independent business owner where you don't have the large financial backing of a chain? How do you stay current?

DN: Well, we hear a lot of stuff from our customers, so, as far as what's going on in the culinary scene...but, as far as staying current, you know, not having the dollars, we live it. I mean, my partner, Kyle, and I are here 80 hours a week if not more, so, you know, we're just constantly living our business, literally.

KG: And, how did you and Kyle come about to open the restaurant...this particular restaurant...in the first place? You mentioned Joyce's, but how about Danton's specifically?

DN: Well, his father died, and his father helped raise me and was fairly instrumental in my life, so, when he died, I was living in Austin as a private caterer, and I came down to help Kyle with his dad's estate and just to spend some time with him. And, we had always talked about having a restaurant, and one night we were having a few adult beverages and he looked over at me and said "well, are we ever gonna f'in do it?" And I said "let's go." So, I went to Austin, sold all my stuff, and came down here. Of course, we didn't know that the economy was gonna do what it did, or that Ike was gonna come through when it happened, but, that's just a roll of the dice. It's just life.

KG: And, how did you settle on this particular location and this area of town?

DN: Well, you know I grew up in West University and so did Kyle, so we're inner-loop people and that's what we know and that's the customer base that we know and that's where most of my customers that know me are. So, we just were looking and looking and could not find anything anywhere. And, everybody said, you know, "you're crazy, give it up, you're gonna have to go outside the loop." This place came open. Of course, having grown up in this area I knew that it had been Anthony's and several other places. I also knew that it was somewhat of a location that, what I call "has a little smell to it." But, it came fully equipped, which saved me hundreds of thousands of dollars. And, it was available. And, the rent wasn't bad. The restaurant itself is actually, square footage, it's too big. I don't need this much space. It's great for huge parties and buyouts and stuff like that, but, to fill up on a regular basis it's a little big. It stretches out my rent, and it's just...it would be easier to operate smaller. I also have a kitchen that's bigger than any that I've ever had. So, I've got additional space that I don't necessarily need. But, like I said, all in all, I ended up saving about a half-million dollars to open. So, that was very much a consideration.

KG: One promotion I've heard that you do to help fill the restaurant up is you do a very unique type of brunch on Sunday...a live music brunch...

Interviewee: Nix, Danton

Interview Date: September 30, 2010

DN: Right. We do.

KG: ...tell me about that and how that came about that you would incorporate that into your business.

DN: Well, I have been in love with the blues for years and years. My brother and I are both collectors of anything we can get our hands on. We've been involved in the local scene just as running around listening to music for the last 20 or 30 years. So, this is something that I've always wanted to do. I ran a place in Austin called Stubb's Barbecue and we had a...what's the word...we had a brunch there, but it was...what's the religious word...

KG: Gospel?

DN: Gospel. Excuse me...gospel brunch that I ran in there for them for a number of years. And I saw how it was done and I thought "well, gosh, you know, I want to do that with the blues." So, I had always...it's been in the back of my mind for about 20 years to do that. So, I finally had a nice location, walked into this place. We have a little rise in the back where the band plays and it plays very well just shooting out. I happen to have a guy named Roger Woods and Reginald Burns who are in the local music scene are friends of mine helped me get in touch with some good local guys that have actually lived it and breathed it. So, you know, I've had some good help along the way, and I just thought, you know, nobody else is doing it, it's unique, it's something that I wanna do. You know, that's my church is on Sunday when I've got...listening to these guys play.

KG: And, you've helped a number of notable blues musicians. Do you have any personal favorites that have played here?

DN: Milton Hopkins is an unbelievably great human being and a phenomenal musician. He and his entire band are great, very attached to them. Texas Johnny Brown has been real good to us. And then...other than that we...word has gotten out and, so, I've got people around town and around Texas and even some from the South sending me CDs and wanting to come play here. So, that's been a lot of fun for me to expose me to some people that I don't know and also gives me the opportunity to bring some people to town when they're available.

KG: And, are customers receptive? Do you see regular customers coming in regularly to check out the musicians?

DN: I do. I...it's been kind of sporadic. It's not has been as busy as I'd wanted it to be, but, on some days, you know, we'll be here and be totally booked up or overbooked. And, there's other times that I'll be sitting here 40 percent full. So, you know, it kind of comes and goes. And, one thing I did was, the same format that I did in Austin, which was two seatings. And, I quickly found out that people in Houston really don't like being regimented and told when to come and when not to. So, we've changed that to an open seating from 11 to 4, and now we just do a sheet of specials and our regular menu, and people seem to be responding to that.



**Interviewee: Nix, Danton****Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

KG: You mentioned early...that, you talked about...you mentioned Hurricane Ike and how no one could have, obviously, seen that coming...

DN: Right.

KG: Another thing that I don't think anyone saw coming that I wanted to draw your attention to was the recent oil spill...

DN: Absolutely.

KG: ..and the press that it got. How has the recent...the events in the gulf changed how you operate day-to-day in your establishment?

DN: Well, other than driving up prices on oysters and availability, which is still a nightmare...excuse me...shrimp prices, and I'm talking about gulf products. And...but also the perception that all seafood coming out of the Gulf of Mexico is tainted. That, I think, people are finally letting go of, but that has been a huge one. Just because they hear what's on the news and they assume that, you know, it's just phenomenal, not realizing how big the gulf is and how productive that the gulf is. It's a very unique body of water.

KG: And, I read that you've been using the same oyster supplier for, I believe, it's going on over 25 years now from your days with Goode Company...

DN: Absolutely.

KG: ...in Smith Bay.

DN: Smith Point.

KG: Smith Point, excuse me, Texas. What sort of...how has it affected your relationship with them as far as quantity bought and just whatever business relationship you have?

DN: Well, what's it's done for me even pre-BP was that I always had a good product and it was something you could trust. And, when you're selling oysters that's very important. There's a lot of fly-by-nights, people that pull oysters out of polluted areas, et cetera. But, having had that relationship now, I think, they...it's Jeri's Oysters...and they go...not go out of their way...but I'm on a preferred list, so I make sure that I can get a product. It's also a product that I know how they handle it, I know what's going on with it. And, it's just, you know, very important that, you know, the product be pristine, safe, and the best one you can get. So, it's kept me in the loop, whereas, a lot of people have just...you can't get the product.

KG: After the spill, there was a large, obviously, government response to "what are we going to do about this?" What response did you see from the City of Houston as far as "how are we going

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton**

**Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

to effect...how are we going to help our businesses that have been negatively affected?" Did you see any response from them to help out?

DN: I saw zero.

KG: Zero?

DN: I saw some response from some government...state government agencies that were putting out, you know, some posters about seafood being safe and stuff like that. So, I mean, and that helped somewhat. That's just not necessarily what made news and what people wanted to hear.

KG: Would you have liked to have seen a more active response on behalf of the city to help those that have been effected business-wise?

DN: Absolutely. I mean, it affects the city, too. It affects their sales tax and their revenues and, obviously, the city is hurting like everybody else in the world and everybody else in the United States right now. So, I was a little disappointed by that. I would have liked to have seen at least some press releases and somebody on there everyday saying something about it. You know, we're all trying to survive, and every time you shut down a restaurant you're definitely negatively impacting the economy and there's people who can't feed their families. I mean...it's...it doesn't take long.

KG: How much of your...the inventory of what you serve...is actually taken...drawn from the Gulf of Mexico?

DN: We're talking seafood-wise or are we talking total?

KG: Either.

DN: Either? OK. Seafood-wise 80 percent. And, so, you know, the majority of it. I try and stick with my seafood products from the Gulf of Mexico because I feel like the Gulf of Mexico is a unique body of water, it's very rich, produces a phenomenal amount of seafood, and it has a real natural sweetness to it, a real unique flavor in my opinion.

KG: Because of the press surrounding the oil spill, have you seen any sort of decline in business, customer response? As the business owner, what response have you seen on behalf of the public in response to the press?

DN: Well, I, you know, definitely saw a drop-off of business. And, it's still not exactly...it's not where it was this time last year. So, I'm, you know, it's still affecting me directly. And, what was the second part of your question, I'm sorry?

KG: Do you think the press coverage played into that or do you think it was just people's perceptions?

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton**

**Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

DN: I think the press coverage played into it because, say CNN being down there, you know, 24 hours a day, you know, just going on and on and on and on and on and kind of...not beating a dead horse...but, not giving correct information. Basically, what they're saying was there's, you know, the whole entire gulf's gonna be shut down. Well, it was only so far it's been a lot of marshes...Louisiana got hit hard, okay? The rest of the gulf has not been hit that bad so far. There's still a lot of oil out there, we don't know where it is, but...so I think they made it sound like that anything out of the gulf was bad.

KG: So, you're not only having to deal with the spill itself, but also sort of the scare tactics on behalf of the press?

DN: Absolutely. And now we're not hearing, you know...now, this whole thing kind of died now we've moved onto something else. But, you know, they never have come back and said that and really corrected the information that they gave out and made it available to the citizens who need it to, you know, make their own judgment on what's going on, but also realize that the seafood is safe.

KG: You mentioned that you've not quite got back up to where you were this time last year. Do you think that's solely due to the economic crisis right now, or do you think that that's a combination of the economic crisis and the oil spill?

DN: I think it's probably a combination. But, this is the first year that I haven't shown growth. And, I've talked to some other friends of mine in the business and, in the seafood business particularly, that are feeling the same thing. So, I mean, although the economy is bad and I don't personally think it's gonna get any better in the next few years, I do think that the oil spill is still driving people to go eat another type of food.

KG: So, what as a business owner can you do to maintain your own establishment's success in light of that public perception?

DN: Well, what we try and do is be out there on the tables all the time talking to people, making sure they, you know...word of mouth, and shaking hands, and letting people know, let them taste it, and let them realize that it is good. There's also a lot of information on the internet that says that...that shows that the food has not been contaminated. So, anything I can get my hands on, I'm trying to educate my customers one by one.

KG: So, pretty much what you...the best thing you can do for this is stand by your product?

DN: Absolutely.

KG: Which is what you've been doing the whole time.

DN: Right.

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton**

**Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

KG: So, that's interesting. One theme that we're sort of exploring with this project is the concept of a culinary crossroads. That Houston geographically sits sort of at the crossroads between southern cuisine, western cuisine, and gulf cuisine. As a business owner, what do you think of that? Are we at a culinary crossroads in Houston, or do we tend to lean more towards one or the other cuisine?

DN: Well, you know, my influences are definitely South Louisiana. I fell in love with that just, I think, it's one of the last regional foods that are still in tact and it made a lot of sense to me, I just kind of fell in love with it. Of course, I'm very influenced by Mexico also. I do, I think that we are here, but also with our population being so varied and so many different influences being brought in that I think there's just a lot of interesting stuff going on here. But, seafood-wise Louisiana tends to influence what goes on more than anything else.

KG: So, you try to as, especially with being influenced by all these different cuisines, do you try to infuse that in your own individual dishes? Take a variety of ingredients and techniques and whatnot?

DN: I do. It just depends on what interests me. What I'm really doing here is a retro look at seafood. So, I'm doing stuff that comes more from stuff that I grew up with. I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel. I'm not into the fusion game, that doesn't really interest me at this particular time. Not that it won't in a couple years...but. Everybody in the world's out there trying to do the fusion. So, I'm trying to do something just real straightforward that's very accessible...just a great, fresh, you know, great tasting plate of food on the table.

KG: If you had to pick the one dish on your menu that you would say is your absolute favorite, what would it be?

DN: Hmmmm...

KG: It's like asking you to pick one of your children, isn't it?

DN: Yeah, it is! That might be easier! But...gosh...well, I guess the thing that I've gotten the most mileage out of, other than some gumbo and a few other soups, has been the Crab Danton. What I like about it is it's just simplistic. It is. The white garlic remoulade that I make is my signature sauce and I just...that came out of the blue 20 years ago. But, it just goes very well with the crabmeat and some little green onions and gives you an opportunity to really taste the seafood without overpowering it.

KG: A look at the reviews of the restaurant, of Danton's, you've gotten some exceptional reviews since you opened the restaurant. When you see one of those in the newspaper, how does that make you feel as the person who created that?

DN: I'm very underwhelmed by myself, to be honest with you. I'm always looking to do something else. And, once I've done something, it's done and I've moved on. And, that's not

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton**

**Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

just about cooking, that's just kind of my mentality. So, believe me, I like the press and I enjoy getting it and it's nice, but I really pay more attention to the negative stuff.

KG: Why is that?

DN: Because I need to know what I'm doing wrong. I mean, that's...you know, I expect what I do to be good, and, when it's not, that upsets me quite a bit. When it's done right, you know, it's good for the moment, but let's move on. You know, there's a saying in the restaurant business: "you're only as good as the last plate you served." And, actually, you know, it's been my experience that it's very true. You're constantly moving on. It's not like somebody who paints or creates or manufactures and you've got something to look at or think about or, you know, I mean, it's in somebody's stomach and...moved on. But, you know, it's nice to make people happy and it's nice to see that immediate reaction. But, it's always about, you know, what are you need to do next? What are you gonna do next? There's really very little time to sit back and say "aww, man, I'm good, I'm really great."

KG: Can you give me an example of a time you got a negative review and you actually changed...what's an example that you maybe got a review that you weren't expecting or someone said something and you actively changed a recipe or something?

DN: Well, I've had several on some different soups and gumbos that I've done that I...I look at all of them and think about them. But, there's been a couple....these have been years past...that people made some comments, particularly about my gumbos, 'cause I just love gumbo...and always working on them...and people say "well, you could've used this, you could've used that, could've used this," and as painful as it was, you have to go "shit, they're right!" You know, or "let me try it." But you always have to quantify who does it come from?

KG: You haven't gotten many bad reviews. I did my homework, you haven't gotten many bad reviews!

DN: I've been very fortunate.

KG: So, what is your...you mentioned how you were successful as...you stand by your product, you listen to your customers...what is your long-term success program to be current, to be successful in a city as competitive as Houston? What's your long-term program for that?

DN: Well, my long-term is to stay with Danton's right now, and get another two, or three, or four of these going. And, I'd like at some point to be able to travel a little bit, and go eat some other peoples' food, and see the world. I've spend the last 30 years working almost non-stop, very little time off, very little traveling, I'm a workaholic. But, at some point I'd like to have the money and the competent staff that would allow me to go see the world, and relax a little bit.

KG: And you'd like to eventually open more Danton's?

**Interviewee: Nix, Danton**

**Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

DN: Oh yeah, absolutely. And I'm currently trying to get some of my sauces and spice mixes on the shelves at the grocery stores, see if that can be another avenue for some revenue.

KG: How do you go about doing something like that?

DN: Well, say you go to somewhere like Central Market. First, you try and get a contact because everybody in the world is trying to talk to these people. So, I've been fortunate enough to have a couple contacts. I'm not anywhere near, it's just, I got through to somebody who would actually talk to me. So, it's...then you talk to them about...first, they have to, you know, fall in love with your product and you've got to have not only a product but you have to have a name behind it. Enough people...enough of my customers here are asking to see my product on the shelves, so, I'm always like "well, next time you're in Central Market would you say something?" And, that helps. And then you gotta find somebody who can produce it for you, you know, sign your non-compete and make sure that they can do it correctly, they don't have to put too many additives and then, you know, and then your labeling and then you're in the marketing game, which is certainly not my forte, that would be my partner's.

KG: You've been in the restaurant industry for most of your adult life, you said so yourself. Do you ever have any thoughts of retiring, taking an early retirement, quitting, or is this just what you have to do?

DN: Well, you know, right now, you know, everything that I've owned is invested in this place, so I'm not going anywhere. My only thought is to, you know, keep it cranking. But, yeah, I'm just now starting, and, I'm in my early-50s, I'm just now starting to think that, you know, some retirement, some time off and stuff would be something that I would really enjoy. But, of course, you have to have somebody to do it with and it's hard to have relationships when you're in this business also. So, it's, I was married once, it didn't take, which actually ended up being a good thing. But, it's, you know, when you only have half a day off for somebody and you're tired and you're working 14-15 hours a day, it's hard to have a relationship with somebody.

KG: That was my next question. You mentioned that you're working, regularly, 80 hours a week here. What effect does that have on your personal life, other than the time constraints, in maintaining friendships, and relationships, and things like that.

DN: Well, as far as, you know, most of my friendships, my friends will...they all come up here to see me. They eat and, most of them like my food, or they say they do. And...so that give me an avenue to see them and they'll come late at night, you know, after 9:00 if they wanna sit down and talk to me, and we'll do that. I'll cook for them and we'll have that. As far as relationship with any kind of romantic relationship or long-term, it just doesn't ever work out because who wants to, you know, somebody wants a relationship they usually want somebody else involved.

KG: But, you do this because you love it.

DN: You know, yeah, I do. I do. And I always say "well, if I knew then what I know now, I'd do something else." But, then again, I don't know if that's true at all.



**Interviewee: Nix, Danton**

**Interview Date: September 30, 2010**

KG: If you weren't doing this, what else would you be doing as a career?

DN: I literally have no idea. I really don't. And I think about it a lot. So, it's not, it's just, that I, you know, I don't know what would work.

KG: That probably means that you're in the right business then!

DN: Yeah! Yeah! Too much free time would probably throw me off completely.

KG: Well, unless you have anything else to add that's all the questions I have. Do you have anything else you'd like to add just in general?

DN: No, not at all.

KG: Well, I'd like to thank you very much for speaking to me. It's been an absolute pleasure.

DN: Yeah, I enjoyed it! I'm glad you like my food. Look forward to seeing you in here.

