

# ARTICLE

## **Barbecue, the Preacher and the Power of Curiosity**

Photography and story by Eric Dusenbery

The upside-down figure on the ground glass was carefully composed and focused. I withdrew from under the dark focusing cloth of the 4 x 5 large format camera and put in a film holder, set the shutter and waited. I asked the subject to hold very still and waited longer. Finally, the smoke from a nearby barbecue smoker cleared and I made two quick exposures before again being engulfed.

My daily driving routine for the past three months takes me past a small country church. On most days there is no activity. But, on Thursdays, when I drive back home around 10 a.m., a man wearing an apron and baseball cap tends two large smokers sitting in front of the church under huge live oak trees.

Smoke billows out from the smokers and handmade signs near the road beckon drivers to stop for barbecue pork, chicken and ribs. Around 11, the dirt parking lot starts filling up with cars.

I am too early on most Thursdays to stop in for lunch. But, curiosity got the best of me recently so I decided to stop for a chat. Meeting strangers is never easy. Asking if they mind if I make a photograph or two is even harder. But, that's what curiosity does. It gets me uncomfortable. But, the desire to understand people and find out what they have to say is a bit of an adventure and far outweighs the risks of being too timid to discover and share stories. And, everyone has a story.

Pastor Scotty Clark of the Greater Union Missionary Baptist Church, greeted me with a hearty handshake and told me about barbecue and the church.



“The barbecue has supported this church for over 30 years,” Pastor Scotty said. “My mother is the one who came up with the idea as we needed money. So, instead of asking people for donations, they decided to get out and provide a service to the community as a means to raise funds. Barbecue was the answer.”

Pastor Scotty and his church seem to know a thing or two about marketing. Read articles and books on the latest business and marketing tips and before long, they all begin to look alike. But, down in the trenches, immersed in the day-to-day realities of running a business and talking to those directly involved is where to learn useful marketing tips.

“Most people that live in the area, they know we're out here, and a lot of them will come out and buy barbecue because they know it's to support the church. You've got a lot of good people here. They know that the church has a vital role in the community.”

When I drove by, hand-painted signs for PORK, RIBS, and CHICKEN got my attention. I didn't have to cut through industry jargon on a website to learn about the barbecue. Authenticity is a trending industry buzzword and they have plenty of it.

It's also a sensory overload; the smell of the smoke, the sound the fire, the taste the ribs, the sight of people licking their fingers — all leading to referral and repeat business. Using multiple sensory sources drew me in as it does quite a few other people.

And, it all starts with curiosity.

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