Questions & Answers

Here are some possible questions and answers for an interview.

Why should someone start smoking?

*Smoking is easy and gives a great taste to food. If you learn a few basic skills, you can make great pulled pork, brisket, ribs, chicken and fish that have a more complex flavour than any gas grill or oven. There is a reason I am the old FAT guy.*

Doesn’t smoking take a lot of time?

*Some dishes take 14 hours or more to smoke. It is referred to as low and slow cooking. However, the smoker does most of the work. For example, to make pulled pork, you rub it with spices then put it in the smoker where it smokes for hours. You just have to check on the temperature once in a while. Then, you just have to take it out and let it rest before pulling it. I can take hours to cook but you only spend a few minutes of your time preparing it. There are also dishes like shrimp that are ready in as little as 20 minutes. Also, it is relaxing to keep track of your smoker and, of course, it is important you keep hydrated.*

There are so many different types of smokers. Which one should I buy?

*That depends on what you want to make, how lazy you are and how much money you want to spend. If you want total control, you can buy a charcoal bullet smoker or an offset smoker that lets you build your own fire. If you want it to be easy, you can buy an electric smoker or pellet smoker that you just set the temperature on and it takes care of itself. If you are on a limited budget, you can buy a small electric smoker, or you can spend thousands of dollars on a top of the line offset or pellet smoker with all the bells and whistles. What you need to know is that all of them make great smoked food. Decide how much you can afford, how much food you want to cook, and how automatic you want the process to be.*

How did you get into smoking?

*I have always loved food. I took culinary training as a young man but left the industry, but I always loved cooking. When I retired, I wanted to try something new. I got an inexpensive electric smoker. I bought books and checked out web sites on smoking and didn’t succeed very well. The books were written by competition winners and experts. They assumed I had knowledge of smoking and used advanced techniques. I almost gave up. Then I joined some smoking forums. I found out that real people only need some basic skills to turn out great smoked food. Once you had them you could grow to more advanced projects like making cured sausage and bacon. I was hooked.*

I don’t have any cooking experience. Can I learn to smoke?

*Smoking is a great way for a beginner to start smoking. Because everything takes a long time to cook, it is hard to mess it up with over or under cooking. The basics are to add some spices, put the meat in the smoker and cook it to an internal temperature when it will be perfectly done and then serve it. It is so easy I can do it!*

How is smoking different than cooking on a grill or other kinds of cooking?

*When you cook on a gas grill you are using direct heat to cook your food. Even if you turn the burner off under the food, there is direct radiant heat. You just can’t cook for the long times needed to make pork tender and for smoke flavour to get into the meat. Also, cooking by other methods is usually done by time (so many minutes per pound). Smoking is usually done by cooking the meat to a set internal temperature. This allows you to cook tougher cuts of meat until they fat and collagen softens to wonderful juicy goodness!*

Can you cook anything other than meat in a smoker?

*Depending on the type of smoker, you can use it like an oven to make sides like cornbread, mac and cheese, and even cookies. Some smokers can go to high temperatures and are great for making pizzas with that wood fired flavour. Your imagination is the limit.*

What is your favourite thing to smoke?

*Which of your children is your favourite? There are so many great dishes that taste great. I can’t pick one but my favourites include Pork Belly Burnt ends, Beef Ribs and Chicken Wings.*

Why did you start a blog, learn to smoke and write a book after you retired? Shouldn’t you be taking it easy?

*I really encourage you to find something you love when you retire. I love food. I love preparing food. I love sharing food with my friends and family. When I retired, I just had more time to do what I love. I took the opportunity to learn a new skill that I could grow into. As I became proficient, I wanted to share what I learned and meet people who had similar interests. A blog just seemed a natural way to do it. The local community channel saw it and asked me to do a show. Then friends asked for me to write down how to smoke and that turned into a book. I may be retired but I have met many people, learned many things and had fun. That is what retirement should be about.*

Do you have any advice on writing a book?

*Don’t do it. Well, don’t do it unless you are willing to do some work. Writing the book is the easy part. I never realized how much editing and formatting goes into a book. It takes months and lots of decisions have to be made. Then, when the book is finally published, you have to market it. That takes more time. I have enjoyed the process, but it is time consuming. Also, don’t count on it as a source of income. You have to sell a lot of books to make a living wage. Think of it as a labour of love and go in with your eyes open to the time required.*