

# Life is sweet



**Candymaker Robert "King" Wilkerson and his dog Kenya**

The "Kitchen Sisters," Nikki Silva and Davia Nelson, are known for their series, "Hidden Kitchens," which airs on National Public Radio. Their anthropological reporting work recently earned them the esteemed duPont-Columbia Award, considered to be the Pulitzer of broadcast journalism.

By using simple techniques—like creating a phone message line to collect leads on the unusual places in which people cook—they have gathered a rich assortment of folklore-like stories, such as that of Robert "King" Wilkerson, whose "kitchen" was in his cell at Louisiana's Angola State Penitentiary. During his 31-year incarceration, King made pralines (which he now calls Freelines), using pecans, milk and sugar given to him by other prisoners and cooking the candy in soda cans. Since his release in 2001, he's been cooking up batches of his Freelines with his dog Kenya at his side and selling them to support prisoners' rights causes.

King, who was living in New Orleans when

Katrina hit, was among those who refused to be rescued if it meant leaving his dog behind. As he explains, "I could have went to the Superdome, but there was no place to keep a dog. Kenya—that name of my dog—I got her when she fit in the palm of my hand, you know, so I elected to hold tight." There were some people who came by in boats and exchanged food. I gave mostly candy away. There were dogs screaming who had been locked up in houses, and my neighbor next door, I had to break into the house, but I sealed it back up. I had to go out to feed her dogs.... I was hearing about so much death and devastation that was going on around me, I felt it imperative that I save a life. I think I did more in those 16 days that I was in the house after Katrina than I did in 31 years I did in prison..

King and Kenya now make their home in Atlanta where they continue to stir up batches of Freelines. Find out more by visiting [www.kingsfreelines.com](http://www.kingsfreelines.com) and [www.kitchensisters.org](http://www.kitchensisters.org).

*King's words reprinted by permission of National Public Radio.*