

**ANN MAYLIE BRUCE**  
**Maylie's Restaurant – New Orleans, LA**

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Location: Uptown, New Orleans  
Interviewer: Sara Roahen, Southern Foodways Alliance  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
Length: 1 hour 14 minutes  
Project: Southern Gumbo Trail – Louisiana

**[Begin Ann Maylie Bruce Interview]**

**00:00:00**

**Sara Roahen:** This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It’s Monday, November 6, 2008. I’m in New Orleans, Louisiana, with Mrs. Ann Maylie Bruce, and if I could get you to say your name how you pronounce it and tell us your birth date, we’ll get started.

**00:00:17**

**Ann Maylie Bruce:** You’re exactly right—Ann Maylie Bruce, and I was born November 12, 1942 here in New Orleans.

**00:00:23**

**SR:** Where?

**00:00:26**

**AMB:** At Baptist Hospital.

**00:00:29**

**SR:** And so did you spend—have you lived here your whole life?

**00:00:31**

**AMB:** Yes, I’m the fifth generation.

**00:00:35**

**SR:** And what is your family heritage?

**00:00:38**

**AMB:** Mostly French. The Maylie side is 100-percent French. And my mother’s is Italian, both Northern Italian and Sicily.

**00:00:46**

**SR:** And so did you have some Italian cooking traditions in your house?

**00:00:50**

**AMB:** Not in my house, no. My mother did not cook at all. And my father’s family, everything was French cooking. My other grandmother, not particularly Italian cooking. But I really grew up with the French cooking.

**00:01:09**

**SR:** Well you really grew up with the French cooking because your family had a restaurant. Can you tell me what it was called and where it was located?

**00:01:19**

**AMB:** Originally it was called Maylie and Esparbé Café. And they—it was on, by the Poydras Market on Dryades Street in an old building, and there was a bar at first. Just a little café. And eventually they expanded into a restaurant. There were two friends, Mr. Maylie and Mr. Esparbé,

that married two sisters from France. And Mrs. Maylie ran the household while Madam Esparbé did the cooking. She was the cook down there and she managed the kitchen. So the men eventually were the greeters and held court in the dining room...when it was a stag restaurant. And so women were not allowed in the dining room except on certain occasions, I understand, in little private rooms. But anyway, then when they died, my grandfather inherited the restaurant. He and his brother ran it for a while and then my father inherited the restaurant and he ran it until it closed in—I can't exactly remember—1986 I think it was, but I'm not sure. It was opened in 1876.

**00:02:37**

**SR:** Eighteen seventy-six. Do you know how long it was a stag restaurant?

**00:02:41**

**AMB:** Until World War I, because an aviator, a female aviator, Ruth Law, came in the restaurant one day; this young Air Force person came in with a friend of my grandfather's, and the--the young man kept his hat on the whole time. And Madam Esparbé happened to come through and say to the young man, *Don't you know it's impolite to wear your hat in the restaurant--in a restaurant*, and so she knocked the hat off and with that all the hair fell down. and it was Ruth Law. And so after that they started accepting women.

**00:03:19**

**SR:** They let her stay that day?

**00:03:21**

**AMB:** They must have let her stay; yes. [*Laughs*] There’s some articles in the newspaper written about it because it was so shocking that Ruth Law would have gone into the stag restaurant.

**00:03:31**

**SR:** Were there at that time—were there a lot of restaurants that were stag?

**00:03:35**

**AMB:** I think so. I think there were a lot of restaurants in New Orleans that were stag restaurants. Maybe women could eat in another part of the restaurant, but I think there were a lot of stag restaurants.

**00:03:50**

**SR:** But it wasn’t like a private club or anything?

**00:03:52**

**AMB:** No, no it was a restaurant, but only the men would come in.

**00:03:58**

**SR:** And so as the restaurant expanded, did it stay in the same location?

**00:04:03**

**AMB:** Yes. In about the early 1960s they widened Dryades Street and they tore down half of the old building. They tore down all of the old, old building and the restaurant had to move over into what was formerly used as like a little warehouse.

**00:04:25**

**SR:** And what’s there now?

**00:04:29**

**AMB:** Nothing is there now because the restaurant that opened is now closed. So there’s—it was the Smith & Wollensky (Steakhouse) chain, but it’s closed. And there was one thing about the restaurant that was pretty well known: it was located in two buildings, an old building on the corner and then an alleyway in another building, and the alleyway was open. And many, many years ago my great-uncle went to Baton Rouge and came home with a wisteria vine and it was three pieces of—three branches. And it grew—he planted it. He had a little problem with his lip and they treated him very—he had a little hair lip and so they, you know, gave him anything he wanted. And when they got ready to enclose the alleyway the vine had grown and he didn’t want them to cut it down. So they said *Okay, fine*, and they platted it together and shoved it up through a little hole in this enclosure, and it grew and grew and grew. And then it grew on the front of the building and alongside of the building, and that—it was supposedly—it was very famous. But it’s a wisteria vine, and supposedly that—**[Phone Rings]**. My grandfather supposedly poured the leftover wine every night on the wisteria vine, and that’s why it grew into this tree. It really was very famous, and Josh Logan even wrote a play, *The Wisteria Tree* maybe, and he did come over one night late and he told my parents that that was his inspiration, the wisteria vine at Maylie’s.

**00:06:05**

**SR:** Wow, there’s so much stuff to ask you. I don't know where to start. So I guess—where did you live growing up?

**00:06:14**

**AMB:** Well I lived when I was born on Napoleon Avenue, and then at a—when I was about five years-old they decided to move to the restaurant. They had apartments. In the olden days the families lived above businesses, so at the restaurant they lived above one—in one of the buildings in two apartments. And so there were two apartments up there and one of the cooks had lived there for a while and she had left. And so my parents decided to temporarily move down to the restaurant, and they did have one of the apartments and it was a temporary thing, but it ended up permanent because it was so convenient. So I basically grew up living on top of the restaurant in the Business District.

**00:06:58**

**SR:** Wow, what was that like? Did you like that?

**00:07:02**

**AMB:** It was very unusual, and now that I look back on it, yeah; it really was—I had so many opportunities. The Civic Theater was down the street. I got to go to all the plays at the Civic Theater. I grew up going to the Civic Theater plays and meeting all the actors and actresses because they would come over to the restaurant. I—at night sometimes I’d sit out on the balcony

and I could hear all the music from Rampart Street—you know, jazz music. And I remember the Italian grocery stores and the Jewish shops on Rampart Street, and it was convenient to downtown. And I could walk—when I got a little older I could walk downtown by myself and visit Sears and Holmes—all those old stores—and then go to the movies. My friends would come down on Saturdays and we’d walk on down to the theater, the movie theaters, and then come on home and mother would bring them home in the afternoon. So it was unusual but it was a great. It was really a great opportunity because I got to experience so many things that nobody else did.

**00:08:01**

**SR:** Yeah. Where did you go to school?

**00:08:03**

**AMB:** I first of all went to Miss Aiken’s School in the Garden District, the Miss Aiken’s School for Little People, and that went from kindergarten to fourth grade. And then I went to Louise (S.) McGehee School, McGehee’s on Prytania.

**00:08:19**

**SR:** So probably most of your classmates lived up here, Uptown?

**00:08:22**

**AMB:** Uptown. My—they did except for one little girl a year younger than me, and that was Julie Yokum and she lived in the French Quarter on—oh her mother owned Hové perfume shop



on Royal Street, and Julie lived in an apartment down there, so we were sort of carpooled together at Miss Aiken’s.

**00:08:40**

**SR:** Uh-hm. So did you take meals in the apartment, or did you eat in the restaurant?

**00:08:47**

**AMB:** I usually ate downstairs early and then went up to supposedly study. But now my—and my mother did not cook at all. My mother had no idea how to cook, so we ate at the restaurant and on weekends we’d go across the lake to Mandeville, and my mother did know how to cook one thing: Spam. A can, she’d open a can of Spam and put brown sugar on it and fry it at night on Sunday nights. And then over there we had Beulah, who came to cook lunch for us. So my mother used to always say, *You’ll never be able to say I remember my mother’s cooking, but you’ll always be able to say I remember her sewing*, because she made me clothes.

**00:09:31**

**SR:** Well that’s almost as good as food when you’re a young girl. **[Laughs]**

**00:09:36**

**AMB:** Definitely.

**00:09:36**

**SR:** And so when you would eat in the restaurant, would you just eat at one of the dining room tables or would you eat in the kitchen?

**00:09:44**

**AMB:** No, I'd eat at a dining room table, early, usually before the—anybody came for dinner. Lunch, I can't remember what I did. I was at school a lot. And that's another story, being at school. My mother did not make sandwiches for me like most mothers did. And so she'd just get a tray and put things—the dishes, whatever it was that day, and send it up to Miss Aiken's in a cab, a taxi cab. And so we'd sit on the front porch at Miss Aiken's, and my friends would have the sandwiches and then we'd pick over my food that came from the restaurant—you know, the soup or boiled beef, whatever. And so we all—and I wanted their sandwiches and they wanted my food, so it—I remember that was fun. **[Laughs]**

**00:10:30**

**SR:** That's funny. Did your mom work in the restaurant?

**00:10:31**

**AMB:** Yes, eventually she did. At first she didn't but she—they were busy one day and daddy said, *Get to work*. And she did, and so she became a regular down there working down there.

**00:10:43**

**SR:** Like in the front of the house?

**00:10:45**

**AMB:** Yes. Yeah, she greeted people and just worked around there, but never in the kitchen.

**00:10:54**

**SR:** What about your dad? What was his role in the restaurant?

**00:10:57**

**AMB:** Well he managed the restaurant really and filled in for anybody that was around. Later on, as—he decided he was going to become a cook. And he’d follow recipes. He was never trained as a cook or a chef or anything, but he’d follow recipes and he’d whip little things up and he was quite proud of his meals.

**00:11:16**

**SR:** He would serve customers?

**00:11:18**

**AMB:** No, he just—at home, or maybe if somebody he knew very well came in, he’d whip up a little something that he had read about.

**00:11:27**

**SR:** Like what? Can you remember any examples?

**00:11:29**

**AMB:** I really can't. He liked his—it was a soup, a French soup, Gabor—Gabor. It's like a vegetable—a bean soup, and that was an old family recipe and they did not serve it at the restaurant but he did whip that up.

**00:11:48**

**SR:** What about, so when you would eat in the restaurant early, would you order off the menu or would you just be brought food? Do you remember?

**00:11:58**

**AMB:** No, I--I could have what I wanted that was back there. Yeah, I could have whatever I wanted that was back there, and sometimes also they'd bring the food up to me. They'd send a little tray upstairs with food on it, something.

**00:12:14**

**SR:** Do you remember what maybe some of your favorite things were that they would make?

**00:12:17**

**AMB:** Yes, I remember they made an apple custard type thing in little individual containers, apple something with a meringue on the top, and that was one of my most favorite things. I loved that. I liked the boiled beef—the bouille—and the beef stew. I remember I liked the beef stew a lot. And the shrimp rémoulade.

**00:12:44**

**SR:** Can you describe for the record what the boiled beef, the bouille, is, and at what point in the meal you eat that?

**00:12:51**

**AMB:** The bouille is--is brisket; it’s boiled. And it’s I think sort of a peasant kind of thing in France. It’s boiled, and usually you can put in some potatoes and maybe a carrot or two, and then it’s boiled for hours and hours and hours until it’s very tender and almost falls apart. And then it’s served with the potato and some hot sauce, almost like a ketchup and horseradish sauce. And basically when--when I was in Vienna somebody was telling me about this wonderful dish—this wonderful dish—and it had a different name, but it was basically the same thing. So I think it’s pretty—it’s just soup meat they call it, because when you finish with it you save the broth and you make vegetable soup out of it. So that whenever you had the bouille you were always making vegetable soup too. That was the specialty of the restaurant, the boiled beef.

**00:13:48**

**SR:** And vegetable soup is—was there always vegetable soup?

**00:13:51**

**AMB:** Yeah, and the—basically it was a table d’hôte restaurant where you came in and sat down and the food was brought to you. And so you maybe would start off with a little shrimp or something cold, and then a soup, salad, a fish course, a meat course, dessert and coffee.

**00:14:09**

**SR:** I’m thinking—that makes me think of Tujague's

**00:14:11**

**AMB:** Exactly. It was—Tujague's was Madam Begue’s restaurant originally, and it was the exact same thing. You went in and you were served what they had that day, whatever they decided that day.

**00:14:27**

**SR:** Is Tujague’s the only restaurant that has that kind of service today?

**00:14:31**

**AMB:** As far as I know, yes. As far as—some of the newer ones might do it, but that’s the traditional restaurant.

**00:14:40**

**SR:** And they’re also famous for the bouille?

**00:14:43**

**AMB:** The boiled beef, the soup meat, uh-huh. And to me it’s the best now. It’s very good, and they have the vegetable soup that goes with it too.

**00:14:52**

**SR:** Uh-hm. What about—what was the style of the shrimp rémoulade at Maylie’s?

**00:14:58**

**AMB:** It’s boiled shrimp served on a little bed of lettuce with the rémoulade sauce, and in this case the rémoulade sauce was a Creole mustard. It was the dark reddish-brownish sauce.

**00:15:12**

**SR:** So did it have maybe ketchup in it?

**00:15:14**

**AMB:** It had a little ketchup in it, yes. It did have a little ketchup and green onions, olive oil, the mustard—I think that’s it. And I remember when I was little I’d eat French bread with the rémoulade sauce. That was one of my favorite things.

**00:15:34**

**SR:** Without the shrimp, just with the sauce?

**00:15:38**

**AMB:** Butter and the sauce. [*Laughs*]

**00:15:39**

**SR:** Did you have siblings?

**00:15:42**

**AMB:** No, only child.

**00:15:46**

**SR:** So if both of your parents were working, you just sort of had the run of the apartment?

**00:15:51**

**AMB:** Exactly. That’s why my grades were so good.

**00:15:54**

**SR:** Let’s see, I have a lot—oh, so could you explain a little bit about what you meant about going to Mandeville? You have a family place over there?

**00:16:03**

**AMB:** Yes, we’d go to Mandeville every weekend from the time I was six weeks old until I got in high school and realized that I didn’t have to go and I could stay here with my friends. And so we did have a place; we still—yeah, well we still do.

**00:16:19**

**SR:** And what kind of place is that? Is it a house?

**00:16:23**

**AMB:** It was a house until Hurricane Katrina knocked it down. And so we—I have right now a little cabin, a little one-room cabin with two—a kitchen and a bathroom which Katrina flooded,



but I’m trying to get it back into—livable. It has to be stabilized, and it’s—that’s got a history of its own too because some of the wood that was used to make it—build—it was from an old shack that supposedly de Marigny—Bernard de Marigny’s driver—used to stay in when he’d bring de Marigny from his house to Mandeville. And it was a little two-room shack. When they tore down the shack they used some of the wood to build this little cabin.

**00:17:07**

**SR:** Who is Bernard de Marigny?

**00:17:09**

**AMB:** Bernard de Marigny, well he was quite a celebrity in New Orleans. And he was—developed the first Faubourg, Faubourg Marigny, and then he went across the lake and he developed—he laid out the town of Mandeville. And where Fontainebleau State Park is, that’s where his house was which burned down many, many years ago. And but he--he sort of laid out the plans that developed Mandeville. He was quite a character. Sally Reeves (writer and historian) knows all about him.

**00:17:46**

**SR:** So it’s interesting to me because these days a restaurant person would have a really hard time going away for a weekend. What was business like then? Were the weekends busier or were weeknights busier?

**00:18:02**

**AMB:** It—the restaurant was closed on Sundays. So what we’d do is get in the car after we closed on Saturday and they’d drive the long way through Slidell to get there. And then they’d spend all day Sunday and then pack up and leave early Monday, drive all the way back, and I was always late for school on Monday.

**00:18:19**

**SR:** [*Laughs*] And was the restaurant opened Saturday night for dinner?

**00:18:23**

**AMB:** Yes, it closed at 9 o'clock.

**00:18:26**

**SR:** Tell me a little bit about the clientele at the restaurant that you remember when you were growing up.

**00:18:33**

**AMB:** Mostly businessmen. Yeah, I think if you look at the old registers, the books that they signed, you’ll see mostly men signing the book. You know as I said, it was a stag restaurant. But during the day it was mostly businessmen, and then at night people would come in. There was a period when so many things were torn down in that area, and the night business got—there was just nobody around. The people that lived there had moved out into the suburbs or other places and there wasn’t anything to draw people to that area. And then later on you know they got the

Dome Stadium and things like that that brought more people back to that area. But for a while it was pretty dead.

**00:19:19**

**SR:** And maybe still if Smith & Wollensky didn’t last, huh?

**00:19:25**

**AMB:** No, they did something. They expanded; they bought the building on the corner, and they came down to New Orleans with a different—a chain idea type thing, selling steaks. Everything was really expensive.

**00:19:41**

**SR:** And was there anything in that space between Maylie’s and Smith & Wollensky?

**00:19:46**

**AMB:** There was at one time a department store on the corner of Rampart and Poydras, and they bought that. It’s a big department store; they bought that and they bought the one Maylie’s building.

**00:19:59**

**SR:** And so your family sold that building to Smith & Wollensky?

**00:20:06**

**AMB:** The building, yeah—to Joe Cannizzaro, who then sold to Smith & Wollensky. And he owned—he developed a lot of the Poydras Street corridor. And so they sold to him and then he sold it to Smith & Wollensky.

**00:20:21**

**SR:** Did you ever work in the restaurant?

**00:20:26**

**AMB:** Oh God, well not really, but when I was little and I had absolutely nothing to do—and this was a market restaurant at one point; it was built across the street from the Poydras Market. Across little-bitty Dryades Street, which was a dark little street, there was Flettrich’s Coffee Shop, and it was exactly like the French Market Coffee Shop, the Café du Monde: the big counter in the middle and mirrors around, and they served coffee and then they served breakfast. And there was Mr. Eddie and Mr. Joe--Mr. Johnny; Mr. Eddie and Mr. Johnny. And so I could run across the street, and I just loved Mr. Eddie. Mr. Eddie would always give me a doughnut, and sometimes I wanted to make money. And I was really very young. And at the bar, at the end of our bar, the Maylie’s, bar they had a little counter with cigars and cigarettes and gum and I would take the gum when my parents weren’t looking. I’d take the gum and open a package of five little sticks of gum and then I’d run into the restaurant and I usually knew the people, and I’d sell them sticks of gum for a penny apiece until I got run off by either a waiter or my parents or somebody. And then I’d go take my little pennies. I’d save them up and I’d take my little pennies across the street to Mr. Eddie and get another doughnut. So I did sort of work in the restaurant.

**[Laughs]**

**00:21:58**

**SR:** You worked the restaurant.

**00:22:00**

**AMB:** Doing things like that, yeah.

**00:22:03**

**SR:** Let’s see, what did I jot down? What--what were some of the entrées that you remember being served?

**00:22:13**

**AMB:** Of course the boiled beef, the bouille that was always served. That was a daily beef; that was served daily.

**00:22:20**

**SR:** So is—was that considered like a main course?

**00:22:24**

**AMB:** Yes, yes. That was—you’d get a whole dinner or lunch from the little salad or whatever it was, and that was a dinner, but then you’d get the other things too. Now I do remember Chicken Bonne Femme, which I adored, and I liked the beef stew. They had--they had tripe; they always had tripe, and people loved tripe and they would come in especially for the tripe, but I

could never eat the tripe because I had seen it before it was served. **[Laughs]** That’s a big sponge. The trout, the fish; they had a lot of fish. They had little casseroles with fish—casseroles. Later they did meatballs and spaghetti. That was a little specialty that they would do. Golly I don't, I can't really—I'll have to think about that. Well one thing, yeah; one thing they did—fish vinaigrette, which was a cold red fish with a mayonnaise sauce served with a boiled potato cold, and that was really one of their specialties. And that’s—I'd eat the sauce. I didn't like the fish but I'd eat the sauce on the French bread. And now that I'm much older I really like it. I look back and I like it and I've cooked it. Yeah.

**00:23:44**

**SR:** From your family recipe or—?

**00:23:47**

**AMB:** Yes.

**00:23:48**

**SR:** And do you get that recipe from this book we're looking at?

**00:23:48**

**AMB:** From the little cookbook, yes.

**00:23:50**

**SR:** Yeah, and it tastes the same when you make it out of there?

**00:23:54**

**AMB:** Yes. [*Laughs*]

**00:23:55**

**SR:** Chicken Bonne Femme—can you describe what that is?

**00:24:00**

**AMB:** Yes, the way I remember it is it was chicken with smothered potatoes and bacon, and I just loved it. I’ve recently had it someplace. I can’t remember where it was, but it was very similar, but there’s also a good Chicken Bonne Femme at Tujague’s and it is full of garlic. And when they open the kitchen door you know it’s coming out, but it’s very, very good. It’s different from what I knew but they—you know people interpret the recipes differently.

**00:24:30**

**SR:** What about gumbo? What—do you remember gumbo at the restaurant?

**00:24:32**

**AMB:** Yes, I remember gumbo and—the seafood gumbo. That’s the only type of gumbo that I remember being served down there. In the past few years, I’ve developed a--a real taste for chicken-andouille and turkey-andouille gumbo, but basically when I grew up down there it was the shellfish gumbo, the seafood gumbo.

**00:24:56**

**SR:** And so I’m assuming it had shrimp in it. What else?

**00:25:00**

**AMB:** Shrimp, oysters, crabmeat, okra, and I think we--we have a recipe in the cookbook for it, but it was always the seafood gumbo that I remember down there served with a little bit of rice—real rice, not fake rice.

**00:25:15**

**SR:** What’s the difference between real and fake rice?

**00:25:17**

**AMB:** Real rice, you cook it for 20 minutes. Fake rice—what, you cook it for a minute or so? Instant rice, and it’s hard.

**00:25:25**

**SR:** It looks like you have a register here that you were showing me where your father or your grandfather—I’m not—your grandfather wrote down what they served every night. It’s so precious. And we found a mention of filé gumbo. Do you think that seafood gumbo had filé in it maybe?

**00:25:44**

**AMB:** I would think so. Yeah, I would think so.



**00:25:51**

**SR:** And so I guess you probably always had a soup course?

**00:25:54**

**AMB:** Yes. Vegetable soup, tomato soup, lentil soup, gumbo—what other kinds of soup?

**00:26:05**

**SR:** Turtle?

**00:26:08**

**AMB:** Turtle definitely, and pea soup—split pea soup, yeah. Soup, meat, tomato salad.

**00:26:15**

**SR:** And now where did these recipes originate?

**00:26:18**

**AMB:** Some of these recipes originated from Madam Esparbé, who ran the kitchen in the early days, and I’m not sure which ones—I think in the cookbook some of them are attributed to her, but I guess they just were picked up along the way. And in the last cookbook, there’s some things—one thing in particular: they used to always serve shrimp, shrimp cocktail, and about sometime in the late ‘50s, early ‘60s, shrimp became very, very expensive. And when you’re selling a complete meal for \$1.50—because that’s how much these meals were—Daddy decided

that shrimp was too expensive. So a friend of his, Mildred Costa, had gone to Europe and she came back and she said, *Why don't you serve what they serve in Europe—eggs rémoulade?* And so they started serving stuffed eggs with the rémoulade sauce over it, and that’s one of the things that the restaurant then became very famous—famous where people would come in and order the eggs rémoulade. If I go to parties today, and with my old friends, and they’ll—I’ll say, *What can I bring?* Eggs rémoulade. So—.

**00:27:35**

**SR:** So by *stuffed eggs* do you mean like deviled eggs?

**00:27:38**

**AMB:** Deviled eggs, yeah. Mash up the yolk, a little mayonnaise and maybe some pickle or something in it, and then the rémoulade sauce over that.

**00:27:43**

**SR:** The red rémoulade sauce?

**00:27:46**

**AMB:** It’s a reddish brownish rémoulade.

**00:27:52**

**SR:** Yeah, is that recipe in there?

00:27:52

**AMB:** Yes.

00:27:55

**SR:** I can't wait to make it. *[Laughs]*

00:27:55

**AMB:** It’s good. It really is good.

00:27:59

**SR:** And so what about, do you remember anything about the cooks in the restaurant when you were growing up?

00:28:05

**AMB:** They were all black cooks. Florence was—I remember her so very vividly. And she ran the kitchen and she also had a drinking problem. And every couple of weekends Daddy would have go to get her out of jail. But that was okay. They were--they were really good. They had no training; they just learned how to cook and they were all there for years. Bertie was there for years and years and years. There’s pictures of Albert, who was there. I’ve got pictures of Albert greeting, toasting King Zulu on Rampart Street, and it was--was the whole staff in the kitchen was black.

00:28:44

**SR:** Do you think any recipes originated from them?

**00:28:47**

**AMB:** It—they could have. Yeah, things that they wanted to try to experiment with, yeah.

**00:28:57**

**SR:** So back to the—go ahead.

**00:29:02**

**AMB:** I think Bertie’s—there’s a recipe that’s attributed to Bertie in one of the cookbooks, and it might be Bertie’s Bread Pudding or Bertie’s—something that—I’ll have to look that up.

**00:29:14**

**SR:** Are you saying Bertie like a bird?

**00:29:18**

**AMB:** B-e-r—Bertha. Her name was Bertha and she retired. And she was very much missed. Bertie was just wonderful. She ran the kitchen for years and years and years. When I was little I used to play in the kitchen too. I was--I was their baby. I went to see—this has nothing to do with food, but I went to see the magician, Blackstone the Magician, at the Civic Theater, and Blackstone tied people up. And then he snapped his fingers and they were untied. And so I was very impressed with Blackstone. And I went into the kitchen—Maddy was the dishwasher, and they didn’t have dishwashing machines back then when I was growing up. They had you know

your dishwasher, your glass washer. And so they had a big bin for the used napkins and tablecloths. And so I went in and I got the napkins and I tied Maddy up just like I had seen Blackstone tie the lady up. And Maddy says—got scared, and I said, *Don't get scared. When I clap my hands you'll come out.* And I clapped my hands. **[Laughs]** Maddy didn't get untied, and I clapped my hands some more and Maddy was still—and then Maddy got screaming and hollering and yelling and they had to come—my mother and father had to come and cut Maddy out of the napkins. **[Laughs]** And I was told, *Don't you ever do something like that again.*

**[Laughs]**

**00:30:45**

**SR:** That's a funny memory. I guess you did play in the kitchen.

**00:30:49**

**AMB:** And in high school there was an upstairs above on the old building on the corner and it was—it used to be a dining room at one time, a dining room and had a wine thing up there, but it was all closed up and old and lots of storage space and everything. When I was in high school I invited six of my friends to have a Halloween party upstairs, and the help used to go up these little rickety steps and change clothes upstairs in the little—this old wine room, whatever they had. And so the Silversteins next door had a bar and a mannequin, a head of a mannequin. My mother had a mannequin that she made clothes with, you see. So I put the mannequin at the top of the steps and lit a candle under it and dressed it up like a ghost. And my friends came up and we all screamed and hollered—*Ah!*—but we forgot to tell Maddy that the thing was upstairs. And so Maddy comes walking up the dark steps and she gets to the top and she sees the figure

and starts screaming and hollering, and she ran and fell down the steps screaming and hollering. She was okay, but I was once again told, *Do not [Laughs] scare the help.*

**00:32:01**

**SR:** Poor Maddy. She was tortured by you.

**00:32:03**

**AMB:** Oh yeah, she was.

**00:32:03**

**SR:** Do you know anyone from the restaurant anymore? Like are there—are any of these people from—who worked there still alive?

**00:32:12**

**AMB:** No, not that I know of. Everybody would have been dead. But they worked there for so long that they became, you know, part of your family. But the bartender was there for like 70-something years, and Nilo was there for many, many years as the bartender. The waiters were all there for a long time, a lot of them from the Creole country came in. And the help was there; they just stayed forever. They were part of the family definitely.

**00:32:39**

**SR:** You mentioned the bartender. What—were cocktails a big thing there or was it more wine?

**00:32:46**

**AMB:** Oh no cocktails—drinks, definitely, yeah. In fact they had, the Volstead (Act) is—when Prohibition came. And my grandfather closed off a section of the bar and—with wire like chicken wire—and that was there for years. That was there until the restaurant closed and then they cut it down; they cut it out and took the bottles down, and I still have bottles across the lake (in Mandeville).

**00:33:10**

**SR:** And so how old would you have been when the restaurant closed?

**00:33:14**

**AMB:** I was in my 30s, yeah, my late 30s. But I had been away since I was in my 20s. I had—I moved into an apartment.

**00:33:24**

**SR:** Uh-hm. Did you still go eat at the restaurant as an adult?

**00:33:26**

**AMB:** Uh-hm, yeah. But I mostly took the stuff home, and I parked down there because when I worked in the Business District, see, I had a little parking place. And I parked down there and I had a dog and I’d bring the dog to spend the day at the apartment, and then I’d pick him up in the afternoon and we’d come on home.

**00:33:42**

**SR:** Why did the restaurant close? There just wasn’t—?

**00:33:45**

**AMB:** They just decided that it was time and business at night had really fallen off, and they just really wanted to close it.

**00:33:55**

**SR:** And how old were your parents by then?

**00:33:59**

**AMB:** I guess they must have been in their 70s maybe. Yeah, in their 70s.

**00:34:08**

**SR:** So neither of them is alive.

**00:34:11**

**AMB:** No, no.

**00:34:14**

**SR:** So do you—back to gumbo for a little bit. Do you remember liking that particular gumbo, or what kind of relationship did you have with it?



**00:34:24**

**AMB:** I liked gumbo. I liked the seafood gumbo, and I do remember always—and I probably still do have it—if there are big lumps of crabmeat in it, I pick them out and eat them individually by themselves. They’re too good to eat with everything else. *[Laughs]*

**00:34:39**

**SR:** And I’m assuming—well I don’t know; maybe I shouldn’t assume this. Did it have a roux?

**00:34:41**

**AMB:** Yes, it should have. I wasn’t around the cooking part. I just ate what they cooked, but I would think because it was thick, yeah. I would think it was a roux.

**00:34:52**

**SR:** And what kind of—what color was it?

**00:34:56**

**AMB:** Brown, dark brown.

**00:35:02**

**SR:** And did that seafood gumbo, you think, set your palate for what seafood gumbo should taste like or not?

**00:35:08**

**AMB:** Definitely—very, very definitely.

**00:35:10**

**SR:** Do you make seafood gumbo ever?

**00:35:12**

**AMB:** Occasionally, usually during Lent.

**00:35:15**

**SR:** And what kind of recipe do you use?

**00:35:20**

**AMB:** I use this recipe in—no, I don't. I use the recipe from Richard Collins. But I also do gumbo z'herbes, which I don't think the restaurant ever did. And when I cooked it at the Hermann Grima House (an historical site in the French Quarter)—we did open hearth cooking at the Hermann Grima House—which they still do, and we discovered—my team really, we discovered this green gumbo, and we also discovered that it was—. You had as a Catholic household, you cooked it on Good Friday and you had—you ate it on Good Friday and it had no meat in it—strictly the greens, the herbs, and you had to put at least nine herbs or nine greens in the gumbo, and for every herb--for every green you put in the gumbo you would make a new friend the following year. And the first time I made it down at the Hermann Grima House and brought it home to my husband to eat for dinner, when it was—when he was finished I said, *How did you like it?* And he said, *If you like grass you're going to love this gumbo.* And that was

many, many years ago—about 25 years ago—and so I worked up to, now I have 14 greens in the gumbo and use lots of pepper, seasoned pepper, 19<sup>th</sup> century kitchen pepper. I use a lot of that.

**00:36:48**

**SR:** What do you mean by that?

**00:36:50**

**AMB:** It’s a recipe I got somewhere while cooking at the Hermann Grima House which has got pepper and spices and herbs, and it’s really-- it’s a highly seasoned little kind of—well today you might call it a rub or something. And you put some of that in and that--that jazzes up the taste definitely. And then later on, like the following day, then you can put potatoes in it, and every year—now I say I’m making 14 new friends a year, and every time I do meet somebody I love to say, *The gumbo z’herbes is working; it’s kicked in.* But we went to Vienna one year and I took a little tiny thing. We spent about two or three months there, and I took a little container of 19<sup>th</sup> century kitchen pepper with me. And when I got to Vienna on Holy Thursday I went to the markets, and I don’t speak German. So I’d have to point at, you know, like radishes; point, *There—well, little bag of those, a bunch of those,* and I collected my greens. And at--at one point somebody tried to take the tops off the carrots. *No, no, no! Give me the tops.* I was more concerned about the green than the vegetable. And I came home and I had a little teeny-weeny kitchen and I cooked up the gumbo z’herbes—cooked it up, cooked it up, went out and bought some bread. And when Bob came back on Good Friday night he walked in and I had the gumbo z’herbes waiting. And he said *I don’t believe this. I do not believe I’ve come all the way to Austria and I’ve got to eat this damned stuff.* **[Laughs]** But—and I have pictures of him sitting

there eating it, but it’s--it’s funny, because I make it now and I give it to friends. And I say, *For every green you eat, you make another friend.*

**00:38:38**

**SR:** Um—

**00:38:42**

**AMB:** And Leah Chase makes it too. Leah Chase down at Dooky Chase’s. But she does it—hers is the best mainly because she makes it on Holy Thursday and they empty out the icebox in preparation for Good Friday. So you put chicken, you put sausage, you put beef, you put all the stuff that—the meat, you throw it all in the gumbo and it’s wonderful. So hers is the best, but we couldn’t—as a Catholic you couldn’t eat it on Good Friday because it had meat in it.

**00:39:07**

**SR:** Right, but you can eat it on Holy Thursday.

**00:39:09**

**AMB:** You can eat it on Holy Thursday, yeah. [*Laughs*]

**00:39:12**

**SR:** Can—do you have very specific greens that you use for those 14?

**00:39:19**

**AMB:** Just about. It gets hard. You have, like, parsley. I use celery leaves, carrot leaves, radish leaves, spinach, beet greens, thyme from the thyme bushes...the different herbs, the green herbs—green onions. And I’ve got—I’ve got it up to 14.

**00:39:44**

**SR:** Do you use mustards and collards?

**00:39:48**

**AMB:** Oh yes, I forgot that. Oh very definitely yeah.

**00:39:53**

**SR:** And I guess you have a lot of cooking to do even after that because you have all the vegetables that all the greens were attached to.

**00:39:58**

**AMB:** Exactly. You have a beet salad that night. And the hardest part is chopping it all—cleaning it, because it’s dirty. Those greens are filthy.

**00:40:06**

**SR:** Yeah. So can you tell me a little bit about the process, what you—what you actually do with the greens?

**00:40:11**

**AMB:** You go out and you get the greens and then you wash them. And greens—there are lots of greens, when you get mustard greens, collard greens, turnip greens. And you’ve got a kitchen full of greens, and they have to be washed because they’re dirty, and then you chop and you don’t throw them in the Cuisinart. You chop by hand, and you chop—I separate all the little greens until I get ready to cook them, and you make a little roux and you put the greens in with the kitchen pepper and onions and just cook and cook and cook.

**00:40:41**

**SR:** With just water—you make your own broth out of this?

**00:40:45**

**AMB:** Yes, yes—yeah it’s not that bad. [*Laughs*]

**00:40:49**

**SR:** What, bad? No, I love gumbo z’herbes. You don’t have to convince me. And what--what do you mean that you discovered it at the Hermann Grima House? Did you find it—?

**00:41:00**

**AMB:** Well I had never heard of it before. And none of us that were cooking down there at the time had heard of it either, and we started doing things you know what were local things—using local products—and we came across this gumbo z’herbes, green gumbo. And then when you looked through some of the cookbooks, some of the older cookbooks, you--you started to find it. And so I think it was one of those traditions that sort of faded out. And I don’t—I sort of feel like

we brought it back along with Leah Chase, because we started to talk about this. And people would come into the kitchen, and we—there would be our green gumbo. And I think—I really think that in a way, you know, we—there were about 20 of us all running around talking about the green gumbo, and now it’s available (at) Langenstein’s—all over people have heard about it. And I think that’s one of the, you know, one of the traditions. To me it’s exciting to discover some of these old traditions and do them. Now walking nine churches, I had never heard of that—done that before, until I did it one year. And now we’ve got a little group and every Good Friday we walk the nine churches. And we have a wonderful time; we’re very holy. And then at the very end we go to the Rib Room at the Royal Orleans and have lunch.

**00:42:13**

**SR:** And then when do you—you do that on Good Friday?

**00:42:18**

**AMB:** Good Friday, yeah. We leave—we gather together, and I think there are about three of us now but I started doing it by myself. And I’ve had people come and go, and now we’ve got—three of us have done it for about two years and we look forward to it. And I see more and more people every year doing this—school groups. They’re bringing them in. We do this—we start Uptown and we go down to the Business District and end up in the French Quarter at the Cathedral. But I see every year it seems to be getting bigger, just like going to the cemeteries. That—it was a wonderful old tradition that really died out almost completely, but now I see more people going. I had never done it until that—maybe 10 years ago.

**00:43:01**

**SR:** And what day do you go to the cemetery?

**00:43:03**

**AMB:** All Saints Day, and we take food. One of the traditional things was cookies shaped like-- like little skulls, and it’s hard to find a little skull cookie cutter. But we finally found it. My friend and I finally found it, and now we go—three of us—and we get in the car and we have our routine. I make the cookies shaped like little skulls; Karen makes the egg salad sandwiches; Sally brings the Cokes and the ice. And we bring our floral tributes and we set off, and we spend most of the day. And I think we see more people, a few more people. Because we were very disappointed the first year we did this. We only went to St. Louis No. 3, and we expected crowds of people like we had heard, and there was nobody there. And it was about 3 o’clock and the priest said they have a Mass at the graveyard, at the cemetery, and there were maybe about—a few people. And we said, *What happened?* And he said, *Well it’s just one of these traditions that is just dying out.* Families no longer bring flowers to the cemetery. You know you can pick up the phone and order them. These families have moved away that used to go. My parents never did go to the cemetery. My grandparents did but my parents didn’t. And so we go and it’s a day that we really look forward to now and we—every year we visit more and more people.

**00:44:32**

**SR:** Wow.

**00:44:35**



**AMB:** But we—at every stop we have our little tiny little egg salad sandwich, we drink a little bit of the Coke; we end up with a cookie. Towards the end we break the cookies in half because we’re getting stuffed and it really has—we enjoy it.

**00:44:49**

**SR:** What is the meaning behind the nine-church visit?

**00:44:54**

**AMB:** I think it comes from Europe and it was something—I think they do it up in New York maybe, but here in New Orleans you walked the nine churches. You selected nine churches and on Good Friday you--you walked to each church. You had to walk; you couldn’t drive in a car or take a bus. And it was just something that they did. There’s--there’s a reason for it and I really don’t know the reason, but it was a big, big tradition in New Orleans for many, many years. Families—you read articles about, *When I was a little boy my family—I went with my family to walk the nine churches*. And now, as I said, the groups that do almost in thematic—they carry crosses. There’s one group that carries a cross and they dress you know in the little wraps and—. And I see more and more young people that—they seem to be bringing young people into this.

**00:45:53**

**SR:** And the gumbo z’herbes then you eat that night?

**00:45:55**

**AMB:** Yes, that night.

**00:45:58**

**SR:** And you must make it the day before because it’s very time-consuming.

**00:46:02**

**AMB:** Yes, you make it the day before. You could make it a couple of days before, and really with age it gets a little bit better.

**00:46:08**

**SR:** And what—

**00:46:12**

**AMB:** You make a tremendous pot. You have to make a tremendous pot of it, so then you freeze—I freeze it and we eat a little bit here and a little bit there, and by July I throw what’s left out. [*Laughs*]

**00:46:21**

**SR:** It does make a lot. It grows.

**00:46:26**

**AMB:** Definitely.

**00:46:28**

**SR:** And what is—what do you feel when you’re making that for your Good Friday celebration?

**00:46:31**

**AMB:** I absolutely loved it--love it because I feel like I’m carrying on a tradition, and not many people I know do that. And I get to share some of this with them, especially my neighbors. And I--I just like carrying on these traditions.

**00:46:51**

**SR:** Do you eat the gumbo z’herbes with rice?

**00:46:55**

**AMB:** Yes with real rice.

**00:46:59**

**SR:** And I wonder--I wonder what makes it a gumbo. Is it the roux, you think?

**00:47:03**

**AMB:** I think so, yeah.

**00:47:08**

**SR:** It doesn’t have a lot in common with other gumbos.

**00:47:09**

**AMB:** No, it doesn’t.

**00:47:13**

**SR:** Do you remember what year you maybe started doing that?

**00:47:15**

**AMB:** Wait—1985. It must have been like early 19--the ‘90s, ‘cause when I came back from Scotland in ’85 I went down to see what this Hermann Grima open hearth cooking stuff was all about. And I walked in and just was fascinated by the fact that you could start with nothing in the morning and you had to build your own fire and then you could in the—these kitchens you could have many more burners than we have today. Usually we have four burners on the stove, but as long as you had a little pile of coal and things hanging from the crane...and then we had the protégé with the charcoal burners and you could do so much and you worked so hard and at the end of the day you know there was a whole meal. And I just loved it, so I signed up. Charlie Mackey was the director. And I said I had absolutely no experience but I love it. Could I do this? And he said, *Yes, you can join in with them.* And I did, and we had a wonderful time.

**00:48:28**

**SR:** So you were a volunteer then?

**00:48:30**

**AMB:** I was a volunteer down there and ended up head of the whole cooking program, and we at that point we became—this program became nationally known because we were the only

museum, the only people in the country doing urban Creole cooking. They sent us up to Williamsburg for a symposium, sent two of us up there, and it was wonderful. And we sat there and everything was English and all the representatives, the people that were there that had cooking programs, they were all doing English-American cooking. And I’ll never forget saying to Mary Lou, *Hey, we do something different*. And so on the plane coming home we wrote up a proposition and asked them if we could have a seminar or symposium featuring Creole cooking. And we did, and I think we had it for three years. It was a tremendous amount of work but we had people from all over—the big, big names in open hearth cooking came down for our symposiums. And then I guess after about the third or fourth year we got tired and we said we’ll postpone it. But we had people come in from California—all over for our program, for our symposium, and we got tired and we sent out a note saying well we’ll do it next year. We’re going to take a year off. And we were foolish to do that because then we never did get it going. I wish someday they’d do it again down there.

**00:49:50**

**SR:** So you would make the gumbo z’herbes over the hearth?

**00:49:54**

**AMB:** Over the open hearth, oh very definitely.

**00:49:55**

**SR:** Wow. Would you make other gumbos over the open hearth?

00:49:58

**AMB:** Yes, yes. We’d do the seafood gumbo, and I guess we did chicken gumbo. That would have been it. Yeah, chicken gumbo.

00:50:09

**SR:** What do you do about refrigeration in that context?

00:50:16

**AMB:** [*Laughs*] Well down there we have to cheat, and we do have a separate little kitchen with an icebox. Yeah, it’s—and they don’t cook during the summer. They cook only in the winter months—I think it’s every Thursday--it’s every Thursday. And recently something happened: the Historic New Orleans Collection had their annual—oh their first antique symposium—and on a Saturday afternoon they had an open house at several houses and museums, and one of them was the Hermann Grima House. And I said, *Are ya’ll going to do the cooking?* They said well, *No ‘cause the volunteers, the program, is closed for the summer.* And I said, *Well if we get some people together can we come down and cook,* because we really wanted—we loved doing it. And so they said *Okay, you can do that.* And so I got four of the old cooks; four of us went down there. It was hot, hot, hot. We had the most wonderful time, and for this particular program or cooking demonstration we could serve because it was a private party so we could serve them our little meatballs, our little—they came out of our *Creole Cookery* 1885 cookbook, which is not like an Italian meatball. It’s like a little meatball--it’s a meatball but no gravy. And we did biscuits, and we did a whole bunch of little things that they could taste. And that night the director called me up and said, *I just want ya’ll to know--I just want ya’ll to know that you’re*

*famous now*, because by the time everybody got to this cocktail party the guests were all talking about the food that they ate at the Hermann Grima House.

**00:51:50**

**SR:** Wow. and so normally, just on a normal day at the museum, you’re not allowed to serve the food?

**00:51:54**

**AMB:** No, only for private parties.

**00:52:00**

**SR:** Oh and so you would just get to eat it?

**00:52:02**

**AMB:** Yes, we’d take it home. The first time I cooked down there I brought it home and I served it to Bob, my—I think we had chicken. I know we had an apple pie, and I was so--I was so excited because you get excited when you’ve completed something like this. Like after the program the other day, Martha Irwin said, *God I feel like I’m 21 years old*. Mary Lou O’Keefe said, *I could have gone all night long I was so excited*. So anyway, I brought the food home and I sat and watched as Bob ate it. And he didn’t say anything because at first he had been telling me, *I’m not going to eat that old food cooked out of those dirty old pots and stuff*. And when it was over I said, *Well, what did you think?* And he said, *It was one of the best meals I’ve ever had in*

*my whole life.* You can cook down there anytime you want to as long as you bring it home. So we’d buy the food and we’d cook it and then we’d bring it home and eat it.

**00:52:48**

**SR:** Wow, cool, so neat. I was going to ask something else. Oh, I was going to ask you, you said that in recent years you’ve become a fan of the chicken and andouille sausage type of gumbo. So it sounds like you didn’t grow up eating that?

**00:53:06**

**AMB:** Oh I never had it until a few years ago.

**00:53:07**

**SR:** And where did you first have it?

**00:53:11**

**AMB:** I have no idea. It could have been at one of those little festivals where they—you know in the country river parishes, Cajun country. I don’t really remember where I had it, but I like it and I usually cook it after Thanksgiving, the turkey-andouille gumbo.

**00:53:27**

**SR:** And tell me about that—why after Thanksgiving?

**00:53:28**



**AMB:** Because you’ve got the turkey carcasss, and if you go to someone’s house, if you’re not hosting it and you have to have a carcass, you go to someone’s house and you ask them if they will please give you the bones to take home. *[Laughs]*

**00:53:41**

**SR:** Have you done that?

**00:53:41**

**AMB:** Yes, and then I share it. See, I cook it and then I share it.

**00:53:45**

**SR:** And so tell me a little bit about the process of making that kind of gumbo.

**00:53:50**

**AMB:** Well I make a roux and onions. It’s not--it’s not as thick as the okra gumbo and the filé gumbo. But it’s--it’s basically make the roux—dark brown roux; onions, the turkey. Boil the turkey bones, and the broth is what you use instead of water. And pick the meat off, throw that in, the sausage or ham—throw that in; the seasoning. And once again, you cook and cook and cook.

**00:54:21**

**SR:** Hmm, it’s also a time-consuming gumbo.

**00:54:24**

**AMB:** Uh-hm.

**00:54:24**

**SR:** Do you remember: did you eat smoked meats at all really when you were growing up?

**00:54:29**

**AMB:** I had barbeque from the stands and places, but I don't think so. I never really thought about that but I don't think so.

**00:54:38**

**SR:** So like the seafood gumbo and the rest in Maylie’s—that didn’t have any sausage in it?

**00:54:44**

**AMB:** No.

**00:54:47**

**SR:** But if you did have a gumbo in that era with sausage in it, would it would have been ever a smoked sausage, or mostly fresh sausage?

**00:54:53**

**AMB:** I don't really remember it—a sausage gumbo. I don't remember.

**00:55:02**

**SR:** What about—one question I wanted to ask is what--what kind of food was—did Maylie’s serve? Like what was it called at that point?

**00:55:13**

**AMB:** I think it was called Creole. It would have been a Creole kind of food—French, definitely a French influence.

**00:55:20**

**SR:** But that word *Creole* would have been used?

**00:55:20**

**AMB:** Creole, yeah.

**00:55:25**

**SR:** Did your family consider itself Creole?

**00:55:29**

**AMB:** No, no, no. They were French because the Creoles were the early settlers and they came in 1860-something maybe.

**00:55:44**

**SR:** Did anyone in your family or grandparents maybe speak French?

**00:55:46**

**AMB:** Oh they all did. My father’s family, even my father spoke French before he spoke English. So they spoke French way back then and they taught him French. And they spoke English, but they did have a good knowledge of French.

**00:56:00**

**SR:** Did he teach you French?

**00:56:05**

**AMB:** Nobody could teach me French. *[Laughs]* A French teacher couldn’t teach me French. *[Laughs]* I was a very bad student.

**00:56:14**

**SR:** Well—

**00:56:15**

**AMB:** I had too many things to do.

**00:56:16**

**SR:** Yeah, like living downtown.

**00:56:19**

**AMB:** And I was up—I had a record player; I had a little TV set; I had a radio; I had all these things and I was fascinated. I loved movie stars and movies and I loved the plays at the Little Theater. The Opera—my mother would take me to the Opera when I was little and my mind was far away. Today I can tell you all the Broadway stars, but don't ask me about the English—who wrote what. *[Laughs]*

**00:56:46**

**SR:** Although you are a culinary scholar.

**00:56:46**

**AMB:** Well, no. I just—I went back to school when I was 40 years-old. I went back to Newcomb (College) to take art.

**00:56:58**

**SR:** To take what? To take art?

**00:56:58**

**AMB:** Yes, to go back as—well, I’ve never been a full-time student. I went, after high school I went to Newcomb and took art courses for three years and then went to Europe, and then when I came back I was offered a job. And then I went to secretarial school and did little things. And then it wasn’t until I was 40 years-old and married Bob, who is a professor, and he said, *You’re foolish if you don’t take advantage of a free education.* So I started back at school.

**00:57:32**

**SR:** And do you do art?

**00:57:34**

**AMB:** Yes.

**00:57:36**

**SR:** Oh what-- what kind of art do you do?

**00:57:37**

**AMB:** I do little watercolors mostly and little sort of—it’s sort of primitive but it’s local. I’m fascinated with what they call *the other side of Mardi Gras*, the black side of Mardis Gras. And so that’s what I’ve been doing, a lot of that.

**00:57:52**

**SR:** That’s your subject, huh?

**00:57:54**

**AMB:** Uh-hm.

**00:57:56**

**SR:** Wow, that’s good. What—I guess this is a really broad question, but I’m wondering about the changes you’ve seen in the restaurant culture in New Orleans, you know since you were growing up. Were there a lot of restaurants like Maylie’s and Tujague’s at that point?

**00:58:13**

**AMB:** Not really, but there were family restaurants. Many of them have closed over the years. In fact, I’m always surprised and go back and look at books that have lists of the restaurants not too terribly long ago and how many of them have closed and how new--the new restaurants come and go. I do think that New Orleans is definitely a Creole cooking town, and I get very, very mad when they talk about, *Oh, all the Cajun food in New Orleans*. And there’s some chefs that have come in that have been very successful and they’re really doing the Cajun style of cooking and—but they’re in New Orleans now, and that has become New Orleans cooking. We’ve gotten away from pure Creole. I took a cruise a couple years ago and we came back through New Orleans and ended up in New Orleans, and they had a--a brochure about the history of New Orleans. What is New Orleans known for--it’s Cajun cooking (the brochure said). And I almost went crazy.

**[Laughs]** One of the best restaurants in New Orleans for Cajun cooking is up at the zoo in that little bitty—you know they have that little area that you can get jambalaya and stuff? That was one of the best restaurants to get the Creole—or the Cajun cooking (people said), and it’s just not true. But now everybody believes that we’re a Cajun town. Things like the blackened stuff, the andouille sausage and things like that are—they think that’s New Orleans cooking, but it’s not.

**00:59:57**

**SR:** That’s interesting. So do you--do you feel that some food that’s labeled *Creole* even is not really Creole?

**01:00:05**

**AMB:** Maybe; I’m not sure. There’s so many Creole everything—Creole—what did I see? The Creole Chinese food or something like that, an ad, the best Creole something or other; I think they’ve just used that name. I think when you use the name *Creole*, *Cajun* or *Jazz*, or things like that that are associated with New Orleans, they just use it too much. It gets people excited but it’s not real Creole.

**01:00:45**

**SR:** And so what restaurants in town would you consider real Creole?

**01:00:51**

**AMB:** Hmm, I guess Galatoire’s and Antoine’s, Arnaud’s, the French kind of restaurants—Tujague’s. I don’t know, I don’t know. I don’t go that many places anymore. [*Laughs*]

**01:01:10**

**SR:** But the old-line ones?

**01:01:11**

**AMB:** The old line, yeah. And I’m sure there’s some new ones. I just don’t know what they are.



**01:01:15**

**SR:** I forgot to ask you: you talked about the French bread a couple times. Do you remember, or do you know where ya’ll got your French bread at Maylie’s?

**01:01:26**

**AMB:** No but I don't really; I’d have to really think about that. But we used what they call a *cap loaf*. And it’s not a long skinny loaf of bread. It was like a little ball with a little thing, a little cap on it, and you cut that in half and you served that cap loaf. And I believe, Tujague’s—I believe they still use it. And it’s—I don't know where it’s made. Where would it be made? It’s someplace in the Marigny, one of those bakeries down there I think, but that was wonderful that little cap loaf.

**01:01:57**

**SR:** Tell me a little bit about things that you have from the restaurant that—little treasures.

**01:02:03**

**AMB:** Well I’ve been—I’ve started giving things to the Historic New Orleans Collection. And I’ve recently given them the sign, the enameled sign that said *Maylie and Esparbé Café* that was on the corner of the old building, and it had a bullet hole in it. And I got my father to write out a history of the sign, and it seems like after a St. Patrick’s (Day) Parade going down Dryades Street somebody shot something and it hit the sign. I’ve given them that. I have the registers, which in the olden days they started; you’d sign in and write a little comment. And Tujague’s—Madam Begue’s had a register, and I don't know where that register is, but I’ve got three of them

that I am going to give to the Historic New Orleans Collection. I’ve got this buffet that came from the World’s Fair, the World’s Exhibition at Audubon Park, and what happened with this—a family owned it on St. Charles Avenue, and during the Depression they broke up the house and some man got this piece of furniture. And he didn’t want it; he had to—so he asked my grandfather, he said, *I’ll give you this piece of furniture*. And my grandfather said, *No, I can’t take it*. He said, *But I want it to be in a place that it will be appreciated—that it will be seen*. And my grandfather said, *Okay I’ll take it, but I’ll give you \$20*. And so my grandfather bought this piece of furniture for \$20 and it was at the restaurant for years and years and years and years. And you see the little lions’ heads, little gargoyles or whatever—the little children, including me, would feed it French bread, and so you’d sometimes see French bread sticking in their little mouths.

01:03:46

**SR:** It’s a beautiful piece of furniture.

01:03:48

**AMB:** Yeah, well it’s—thank you. And it was part of a set because the smaller sideboard, somebody from Texas owns that. And they came in one day and they looked at this years ago and they said, *We’re just looking at it because we have the other piece, the matching piece*. And then these pitchers here and the absinthe bottle at the end—I just brought it all to Mandeville. I have pots, the old ceramic—clay pots from I guess France; bowls, some things that they had—pitchers, utensils. I don’t throw things away and neither did my parents and neither did my grandmother. So I’ve got a lot of things from the restaurant—these little tickets that you bought

when it was a stag restaurant. You bought a little ticket and sat down and had your meal, and then when you went in the bar afterwards to have coffee and a drink they’d pull off—or maybe they’d pull this off first, and you presented this to them for your coffee and your drink.

**01:04:55**

**SR:** So you would move—you would move locations?

**01:04:58**

**AMB:** You would sit down at big tables, and I do have a picture of the big tables, and the men would sit down and they’d just bring on the food—different courses. And you served yourself the wine and served yourself whatever you wanted from those plates on the table.

**01:05:17**

**SR:** So it was like family style?

**01:05:18**

**AMB:** Yes, uh-hm.

**01:05:21**

**SR:** And that’s what Tujague’s is like too these days.

**01:05:21**

**AMB:** Uh-hm. A couple of years ago when we had this symposium at the Hermann Grima House, Pat Brady who was working at the Historic New Orleans Collection at the time—and we had Karen Hess who was the mother of all, you know, of cooking programs—Karen Hess and Barbara Wheaton. And I said, *Pat, would you like to come with me to take them to dinner?* And she said, *Very definitely, I would love to.* We were going to take them to Tujague’s. We told Steve Latter, *Steve, we want it to be just like it used to be. We want the food to come on Barbara Wheaton in plates. We’re going to serve ourselves.* And he was so excited; he said, *Look, I’ll give ya’ll the dinner. You just pay for the wine and leave the waiter a tip.* And Pat called me up that—a couple of days before and she said, *Do you mind if I bring somebody with me? His name is John Kukle and he’s down at the Historic Collection and he’s dying to meet Karen Hess.* And so I said, *Not at all.* So we went on down there and we sat around and it was—we had such a good time. People came to our table to watch us. We had the shrimp rémoulade, brought the white and the red, the platter that we served ourselves, the bread; we had the—whatever we had for the soup course, probably vegetable soup in a bowl that we served ourselves. The bouille—served ourselves the Chicken Bonne Femme with—and the bread pudding served—and the coffee in little goblets, you know little glasses. And we had one of the best times. As I said, people just came over to look at us we were having such a good time.

**01:06:53**

And that night when we left—and Karen and Barbara they just loved it; they just had such a good time. And that night as we drove home Pat said, *Can you keep a secret?* And I said, *Very definitely.* And she said, John Kukle tonight—tomorrow it’s going to be announced he’s the Director of the Historic New Orleans Collection. So it was a really fun night.

**01:07:19**

**SR:** What—so I remember that too about Tujague’s, the glasses for the coffee.

**01:07:24**

**AMB:** For the coffee—I always loved that.

**01:07:27**

**SR:** Did they—did you do that at Maylie’s or—?

**01:07:28**

**AMB:** No, not—no, not when I was there. You had cups—that heavy—. I’ve got the, you know the white ceramic with the green rim around it.

**01:07:39**

**SR:** And what kind of coffee did ya’ll have there? Was it Chicory?

**01:07:43**

**AMB:** Chicory yeah, very definitely. Chicory coffee and then you put your cream and sugar— little cream containers.

**01:07:50**

**SR:** Did—do you still drink chicory coffee?

**01:07:51**

**AMB:** When I drink coffee, yeah.

**01:07:55**

**SR:** Well I’m not going—you’ve given us so much time. I’m just going to ask you one more question, unless you have more stuff that you think that I didn’t ask, because there’s so much.

**01:08:06**

**AMB:** One thing, I will be happy to get those things out and you come back sometime and I’ll show you the--the registers.

**01:08:17**

**SR:** Oh yeah. And also I wanted to ask you about the bell. I forgot about that.

**01:08:19**

**AMB:** The bell. Well, the bell from the Poydras Market. When they closed down the Poydras Market my grandfather bought the bell and a big stone that was probably in the building, and it was at the restaurant in the bar for many, many years. And occasionally like if somebody left a big tip or some big event happened, they’d bang on the bell. And when they closed the restaurant they took the bell to...They brought the bell to Mandeville and had it on an iron post, and it was there for many years until Hurricane Gustav (2008) when places—people in Mandeville evacuated around the area. And during that time someone stole the bell from me. And I’m trying to get it back. It’s been in the *St. Tammany Farmer*, and it’s been a written up in the Mandeville

section of *The Times-Picayune*, and so far I have not heard one word. And I’m mad at myself for not giving it to the Historic New Orleans Collection because that’s where it should have been. And to think that somebody is hoarding it somewhere and it really should, you know, be where people could enjoy it.

**01:09:38**

**SR:** And it’s bronze, is that—?

**01:09:40**

**AMB:** It’s bronze. It’s a big bronze bell and it’s got some writing on it. I’ve got pictures of it. And nobody has called so far, and I’ve been all over. I’ve been to the recycling places, the flea markets, the antique stores. My friends have looked it up on the eBay and things like that and nobody has seen it. So the detectives have said it’s someone that probably knew it was there and wanted that bell.

**01:10:12**

**SR:** Uh-hm. There’s a lot of work to go through just to melt down the metal. It probably wasn’t that.

**01:10:18**

**AMB:** No, I don’t think so because the recycling places and the detective I’ve talked to in St. Tammany, they said, *Ma’am, if we find something like this we put it aside.* And one person in--in a place in Bogalusa said, *We don’t even buy bronze anymore because of all that trouble in New*

*Orleans with the cemeteries.* And as I said, the detective said that if it’s sold for recycling they’ll put it aside and call them and say, you know, *We’ve got this.* So I hope it turns up someplace.

**01:10:51**

**SR:** Yeah, me too. What about the cemeteries? What’s—?

**01:10:54**

**AMB:** A few years ago there were—people were going out to take the bronze urns and tablets and so on off, stealing them and selling them to be recycled or selling them at antique stores. And so they—the police did catch a bunch of them. I remember out at Lake Horn they had that big area where they had all the stuff there.

**01:11:18**

**SR:** Yeah, I do remember that. That was juicy. **[Laughs]** So you obviously have a passion for history and for preserving not just, you know, the--the treasures and the traditions from your family’s restaurant, but other recipes and food traditions that you didn’t even know about. What you to—why do you think it’s important to preserve those things?

**01:11:48**

**AMB:** Well I think it’s important to preserve traditions for all of us. I’m fascinated with some of the old things and I’ve had a good time rediscovering some of these traditions. Certainly my interest—when I started with the Hermann Grima House, I was never interested in food before. And I started down there and I loved it so much and it was a group of about 20 of us and we



just—we loved it; we had such a good time discovering things and going around. Like if we would have something that had to be seasonal, we’d do seasonal vegetables and we discovered that there’s no such thing as seasonal vegetables anymore. I mean if you want corn you go and you get the corn—frozen corn, canned corn. When I was little the big thing was to go down to the French Market when they brought the corn in and you had sacks of corn and you’d pick through the corn and take the silk and find little worms, you know, and things like that. And so these—we have everything we want right now and so there’s no big thing when the season changes and, *Oh here come the tomatoes, or here come the oranges* or something like that. We have it all year long. And I just like that idea of looking forward to things food-wise, and I love the traditions of New Orleans. I’ve been fascinated since I was a little girl, fascinated with—I think I remember growing up reading *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, and you know the traditions, the— Marie Laveau and all that stuff. But I think we need to know about our history and it just kills me when, you know, a Mile High Pie at the Pontchartrain Hotel was the thing, and everybody knows Mile High Pie, and yet a few years ago when I went out with some people that were a lot younger than I was and we went to some restaurant and they said, *Oh you’ve got to try the something or other—pie*. And I said, *Oh, that sounds like the Mile High Pie*. And they said, *What’s that?* And I went the Pontchartrain Hotel. Well what’s that? I mean they really did not know the Caribbean Room—the Caribbean Room. And you know it’s something that I grew up with. And so we’re losing those traditions, and that’s why I like to--to rediscover things like the ladies, the cooks, the *cuisinieres*, the Moreau’s Restaurant, Boudreaux’s Restaurant—these things that are forgotten, and there’s lots more out there.

**01:14:15**

**SR:** Gumbo z’herbes?

**01:14:20**

**AMB:** Uh-hm. [*Laughs*]

**01:14:21**

**SR:** Okay, well thank you, Ann. This has been a great conversation.

**01:14:25**

**AMB:** Well I have enjoyed it. It’s been so nice and I’m going to get the rest of the stuff out and bring it out and you come over and you look at everything.

**01:14:31**

**SR:** Oh okay, well I’d love to. Thanks.

**01:14:35**

**AMB:** Now I’m—.

**01:14:35**

**[End Ann Maylie Bruce Interview]**