

ANNOU and DAVID OLIVIER
General Pershing Street—New Orleans, LA

Date: July 23, 2007
Location: General Pershing Street—New Orleans, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 1 hour, 34 minutes
Project: Southern Gumbo Trail

[Begin Olivier-Gumbo Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Monday, July 23, 2007 and I'm in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the Olivier household. Could I have you both say your full name and your birth date please?

00:00:17

Ann [Annou] Olivier: I'm Ann O'livier [*French pronunciation*], or Ann Olivier; born in New Orleans. My birth date is August 31, 1930.

00:00:28

David Olivier: My name is David Victor Olivier, or O'livier [*French pronunciation*] in old parlance, and my birthday is March 10, 1972.

00:00:36

SR: Okay, thank you. And now I'm going to ask Annou [Ann goes by the nickname Annou] a question. And because of some problems with her hearing we're going to be typing some of the questions for her [on a laptop computer]. So if there's a pause, that's why. And I'm going to ask her about being a New Orleans Creole, and ask her what that means to her family and what that means her heritage is, exactly.

00:01:28

AO: Well we say we're Creole because our ancestors were colonial people—that is, they settled here before Louisiana was acquired by the United States. We most—they were mostly French and a little bit Spanish. When the Spaniards took over briefly some of them stayed, and some of them are our ancestors.

00:02:00

SR: I wanted to ask—David is going to be typing the questions for me. So would you ask Annou how far back she's aware of her heritage: what generation of her family came from Europe?

00:02:39

AO: Well the first that came to America was a Canadian, one of the *coureur de bois*: one of the young men, Frenchmen, who came over and ran around in the woods. That was in the early 17th century. Then the first Olivier who came over, came over sometime in the early 18th century, went to Canada and married a Canadian woman. That's where our Canadian connection comes in, and they moved to Louisiana. I think he got here in 1732, which wasn't all that much past when it was first settled. Now on my mother's side—the Cherbonniers—that was her name, that's—well her ancestor, he came over after Napoleon's defeat. He was not colonial; he was actually an immigrant because that was after Louisiana had been sold to the Americans. He came over after Waterloo. He had been one of Napoleon's personal bodyguards. He was crazy, is the fact of the matter; he was so *Rah-rah, Napoleon!* I mean Napoleon's charisma must have been really extraordinary. This Cherbonnier ancestor was one of the ones who arranged to buy the Napoleon House in New Orleans, so Napoleon could move here. When this Cherbonnier

ancestor died [*Laughs*], it was his will that he be buried in full uniform complete with this musket standing up in his tomb, so that when Napoleon sounded the call to battle again he would be ready. He's my favorite ancestor. [*Laughs*] He was actually—he was actually an educator; he was a schoolteacher of all things. He was also a ventriloquist, but we won't go into that.

00:04:59

Now on my mother's side, the Gardere, he also—the one named Grader, he married a what—he married... Oh, I don't remember, but that's where the Spaniards came in outside of the family. He came over in the early 19th century and went to—near Baton Rouge and prospered. And he got—he bought three plantations in New Orleans for his three sons, and that's where one of—no, actually two of—our ancestors settled. But then when—they lived next door to each other and they were—actually they were cousins, or brothers, and their children married—first cousins—which you're not supposed to do anymore. But that's the Creoles for you.

00:05:51

SR: Could you ask [*Annou*] if the Canadians, then, were Acadians? Was that like—was that true of people who came down from Canada that we now call Cajuns? We call the ones that settled in Cajun country Cajuns.

00:06:06

DO: Yeah. They weren't, but I'll get—yeah. I'll ask her.

00:06:20

AO: No, no. They weren't Acadians. No, he—I have forgotten the name of the woman he married. Oh no, she was a Duplessis from Canada, but she was from Trois Rivières, which is along the St. Lawrence. And so they weren't Canadians—at least I don't know of any—I mean they were Canadians but they weren't Acadians, as far as I know. I don't know too much about them.

00:06:53

SR: Okay, okay.

00:06:58

AO: His ancestors [meaning David's maternal ancestors] got to Virginia shortly before my ancestors got to Canada.

00:07:03

SR: Well we're going to ask about that soon.

00:07:07

AO: Ask me about Pocahontas. [*Laughs*]

00:07:10

SR: Okay, I will. We're asking Annou now if anyone besides—anyone with blood other than French and Spanish were considered Creoles. And African American? The exact question is: can anyone besides French and Spanish and Africans be Creole? You've talked about Greek Creoles.

00:07:47

AO: Yes. Creole really comes from the Spanish word meaning *colonial peoples*. And it was adopted in New Orleans for people who were colonial peoples, and who derived from the colonial stock. Some of those people were neither French nor Spanish, and I have some Creole friends, inter-married actually—they have relatives, the Omeichens, who were Greek. There were also the deBaroncellis, who were the—who were Italian. And the Socolas were Italian Creoles. I mean, Dr. Socola, the name is Italian—and that ancestor on that side of his family was Italian, but Dr. Socola was as Creole as they come. Too, the Generellis were also Italian Creoles.

00:08:42

SR: Can you ask—she's told me before that she knows some African Americans or blacks who share your last name, and she—I think she thought maybe there might be some relation.

00:08:58

DO: Oh yeah, we definitely have—I've got plenty of black cousins, so—.

00:09:04

SR: Yeah, I'd like to hear about that.

00:09:10

DO: Which, as a side note, I recently met one of my black cousins—randomly.

00:09:15

SR: Was that at the paint store?

00:09:17

DO: Yeah, that was that one. [*Laughs*]

00:09:22

AO: Oh, we have loads of black cousins. And as everybody knows the—the Creole men often had African mistresses, and with that we're cousins. We just—we're cousins, and in many ways we're similar. I tend to think of the black Creoles, they are those families—well the whole system I think was sort of a limited sort of polygamy. The Creole men had two families: one white and one mixed. And they took care of their mixed children and their mistress. They couldn't marry them, of course, but they took care of them and they—they owned them. Well no, they didn't own them; it was considered improper to own their children, so they were free. That led to the large free people of color in New Orleans and South Louisiana. And of course they're our cousins. Now the women didn't know each other, I mean socially. There was no intercourse there, because of course I don't think women generally liked to think that their husbands or their—their lovers have somebody else. But that was the system.

00:10:45

SR: Can you ask her how far back she's talking? Is this like her grandparents' generation, or before that?

00:10:51

DO: How many generations ago?

00:10:53

SR: Yeah.

00:10:53

DO: And we also had one ancestor who ran off supposedly—.

00:10:57

AO: I should say they [the black Creoles] are Creoles too, in the same sense that we are. [Now addressing the question of generations] Well certainly not after the Civil War, I would imagine, because they couldn't afford two families. Before the Civil War they—they could afford more than one family. The white Creoles tend to be well-to-do, even rich. I mean some of them were very rich, like the de Marignys, who are our cousins. I mean he was extremely rich; he was one of the richest people in the United States at the time. Well at any rate, after the Civil War I don't—I think the system simply died because there was no money. You couldn't afford two families.

00:11:44

SR: David, you said you had somebody in your family that ran off?

00:11:45

DO: Well I'll have to ask her about it because I don't know that story but there's—the story—we'll see if she wants to talk about it [*Laughs*]. But the story is that one of her ancestors left his, you know, his white family for his—for his mixed-race family.

00:12:15

SR: Do you talk about it?

00:12:17

AO: Yes, but I'm not going to go into that very much because I'm not sure that they all know about it. But my mother's—one of her ancestors had a brother who had a black mistress and children. He took them to France, where he married her. They could not marry here. They went to France; he married her and then they settled in one of the eastern seaboard cities. And in fact, one of them recently came and talked to one of my cousins. And he was trying to get information about his family here. She got the impression that he sort of knew that he was mixed race, and so when he asked her about particulars she told him and he said, well he—he thought that that's what had happened. But notice this: even in a northern seaboard city, he was not going to say so. There was prejudice there too, and still is. It's very, very sad.

00:13:27

SR: I agree. Can we—if you don't have another question, can we move to the—? Can you scroll down [on the list of questions on a laptop computer for Annou to read]?

00:13:36

DO: Oh yes—.

00:13:38

AO: Well I'm not going to say too much about him either. *[Laughs]*

00:13:41

SR: That's okay. And I'm asking her now in what part of town she grew up.

00:13:48

AO: In what part of town I grew up? Well in those days, I was thinking, you didn't talk so much about which neighborhood you were from; you talked about which parish you were from. The city was much, much more Catholic than it is now. And so you know, you'd say, *I live in Saint Ann's Parish*, or whatever. And we lived down—well there was an uptown and a downtown; there was Metairie; there was across the river; there was Jefferson; past Metairie—but it didn't even have a name. But we would really more talk about which parish we were from, except we were from downtown. We were—we lived half a block from Esplanade on Claiborne. And that was our neighborhood; it was a very, very mixed neighborhood. A lot of the—the white Creoles had moved uptown, but we stayed forever. We just liked the house and we didn't—we didn't care if we lived near black people. There were always black people around the block, and it was just like that when I was growing up. And so that's where we lived.

00:15:00

SR: What is that neighborhood called now, do you know?

00:15:02

DO: I think of it as being—the opposites—I don't think of Esplanade as—I mean of Treme extending down below Esplanade, but I'm not sure what other people think. But it's like a stone's throw from the Treme, but I don't know what you would call that of Esplanade that they're on. But it's just off—beyond what I think of as the edge of the Treme.

00:15:29

SR: And when you would visit as a kid, is that where they lived?

00:15:36

DO: No, by the time I was—when my father was a teenager, which would have been I guess the late '50s, they moved further up. There was a lot of—and I mean Annou can explain better than I can, but they moved. There was—that neighborhood had really declined, and shortly before—I guess a couple years before I-10 was built through there, they wound up moving further up Esplanade, closer to Bayou St. John, and that's where I would visit as a kid.

00:16:06

SR: Can you ask her which—when they moved there?

00:16:13

DO: Yeah. When did you move to your current house?

00:16:17

AO: We moved there in the mid-50s, after my brother came home one night [*Laughs*], and a black man who was drunk with a knife stopped him and said to him, *I'd kill you, white man, but I just got off a boat so now I have money*, and he staggered off. Huh [*Laughs*], and he told my parents the next day. They thought, *Well, we're not welcome. We better move*. So we did. But we were just—there was one person on our block who stayed, a single woman, and finally she moved too. Now—now the neighborhood is—the houses are falling down. It's just right where the—the interstate goes through, and it's just horrible. But when I was young it was a nice neighborhood. It was very, very pleasant.

00:17:09

SR: And it's not really that far from where she lives now.

00:17:14

DO: No, no. I mean it's—it's maybe 10 blocks. It's still Esplanade Ridge. It's just straight up the, you know, it's just straight up Esplanade Ridge, but not far at all. I mean they didn't move out of—you know a lot of—. We have a lot of cousins who are over on the West Bank, or you know other areas, but they stayed sort of as close as you could and still be kind of in the—you know, not right in that spot.

00:17:42

SR: Let's get to the next question that I wrote out, which is about—I'll just read it verbatim. I understand that your family had a cook, and also that your parents were food enthusiasts and liked to cook themselves. Tell me about family meals in the house where you were growing up.

00:18:00

AO: Yes, we had a cook. My father was not a food enthusiast, however. He—his mother wasn't Creole. **[Laughs]** But that's not—I shouldn't have said that. His mother was the child of an immigrant German who went into the food business, as a matter of fact. They had a maid too, and they had a cook too, so they ate well too, but she never had to cook either. So she didn't like to cook; she didn't know how to cook. The only thing she knew how to cook was some German doughnuts, which we used to have on Mardis Gras, which were delicious. And so my father was not a food enthusiast. His father just wanted to eat meat and potatoes, as my mother said, and that's—and she said that's what killed him. She said there was no variety in his diet, and that's why he died in his 50s. **[Laughs]** The Creoles generally ate a wide variety of foods, and I am sure that's one of the reasons why many Creoles live forever. Their diet was quite good.

00:19:16

SR: Can you ask the name of her family's cook, and whether she was Creole?

00:19:38

AO: The cook was Elnora Ward, who married Willy Gaines, so she was Elnora Ward Gaines. She was from Leonville, Louisiana. She was—she did not consider herself a Creole. She was African American and Indian; she was a quarter Indian. Her grandfather was named Charles

Lamb. And they—she moved to New Orleans when I think she was 18 or 19, went to work for my grandmother. And then my grandfather died and my parents married and lived with my grandmother in their big house. So Elnora Gaines was the cook's name. Then my young—my older brother could not say *Elnora*, so he called her *Gaga*. And that was her nickname—sometimes called Ga. And she was Ga to everybody. And she was a friend to man. And she was just about the best person I've ever known. She was extremely [*emphasis added*] holy. She used to have a key to Peter Claiborne Church. She would take her key and go to—before 6:30 mass, she would go at 6 o'clock, open the church, and turn on the heat so it would be comfortable for everybody. And the priests, they trusted her that much; they gave her a key. She—she had no children, and she just loved all children and she loved everybody. As I say, she was the best person I've ever known. If anybody needed anything, she got her white friends and got what they needed. She was a—sort of a, what would you call it? She was a social agency of one. And she had many white friends; she was friends with everybody. She'd walk to work, which was not that far from Claiborne Avenue, but it was pretty far from where we moved on Esplanade later. But she'd walk and she made friends along the way. And she had some friends who were well-to-do, and if they needed things she'd go to them and ask. She was really quite a remarkable person. She was dyslexic; she was totally dyslexic. My mother discovered that when she must have been in her 40s or 50s. My mother decided to learn the so-called Laubach Method of teaching people how to read in the third world. My mother learned it to teach Ga how to read. Mama said Ga was totally dyslexic. She never made the connection between a sound and a symbol. And it was so sad. My grandmother, who first employed her, had encouraged her to go to night school at Rabouin High School. They had classes, including classes for black people in those days. So she went to Rabouin to learn how to read, but she didn't stay. She couldn't learn.

When she—when my mother said, *Ga I'll teach you how to read*, her first lesson—like 40 years later—no, 50 years later maybe—she brought the same books she had gotten at Rabouin, the same textbooks. She thought they might help. All that time she was desperate to read, and it was just so sad that she never learned, because she was intelligent. But at any rate, she was a wonderful cook. **[Laughs]**

00:23:25

SR: Can you ask her to describe some of her cooking styles?

00:23:30

AO: That's [not learning to read] not the important thing; she was a really good person. When she was buried, the priest came all the way from Texas to go to her funeral.

00:23:42

SR: Wow.

00:23:44

AO: Yeah.

00:23:45

DO: Describe her cooking style.

00:23:46

AO: She cooked the way my mother told her to cook. My mother cooked the way her mother told her to cook. My mother didn't cook when we were young. She would call her mother and ask her, *How do you cook this?* My grandmother would tell my mother, and my mother would tell Ga, and Ga would cook it. My grandmother had been taught to cook by her mother's cook, Aunt Choob, who as another African American.

00:24:21

SR: Who?

00:24:21

AO: Aunt Choob. She had been a slave, and that's the fact of it. She's the one who taught my mother's twin sister to cook. My mother's twin sister loved to cook, and she would go to Aunt Choob's and Aunt Choob told her how to cook. My mother didn't have that gift though.

00:24:42

SR: David just wrote a question on the computer—.

00:24:45

DO: Tell the story about the fire in the backyard.

00:24:46

AO: Oh yes, the fire in the backyard. When Ga came to New Orleans the only thing she knew how to cook was what she called coush-coush, which I'm sure is the same thing as the couscous

of the Africans. So she arrived at 4 o'clock in the morning, found some wood somewhere, set a fire and started to cook coush-coush for breakfast [*Laughs*] in the yard.

00:25:18

SR: But she didn't have to cook over a fire, is that the—?

00:25:19

DO: No, there—there was a kitchen, right?

00:25:23

AO: Hmm?

00:25:27

DO: There was a kitchen?

00:25:30

AO: Oh sure there was a kitchen, but she didn't know how to use a kitchen stove. She was very young, and I think her mother must have been still alive then. Yeah, the kitchen was in the dépendence. It was one of those old houses you know—.

00:25:52

DO: All right.

00:25:54

AO: My two favorites were fried chicken—Ga’s fried chicken, which was as good as Popeye’s—and her stuffed fish: red fish or trout or any nice big fish, and she stuffed it with the old New Orleans French bread, which they do not make anymore. Don’t let anybody tell you they do. And she would just put, well onions and green peppers, green onions—two kinds of onions. She typically cooked with two kinds of onions, and not just one—two kinds of onions, mushrooms, shrimp if there was some around, and she made a stuffing that was out of this world. And on the top she would slice tomatoes and lemons and put those across the top. Actually that was Italian. My mother got that recipe from the local butcher, Mr. Oddo, and she told Ga how to do it and Ga just knew how to cook. I mean she knew what to do. It was so good. [*Emphasis Added*]

00:27:09

SR: Can you ask if that was a whole fish, like with the head on and stuff?

00:27:20

AO: Oh yeah, head and all—oh yes. My mother’s brother-in-law was a great fisherman; they said he could catch trout in your front lawn.

00:27:33

DO: That was Noel?

00:27:34

AO: Uncle Noel, and so he used to bring us great big fish all the time, so we had a lot. And in those days fish were cheap, and it didn't cost \$25 for a good-sized red fish.

00:27:51

SR: What about the custard, David asked?

00:27:56

AO: Ga made custard that was famous, one of those simple dishes. I didn't like custard myself.

00:28:04

DO: I loved that custard.

00:28:06

AO: But I learned how to make it, and I can tell you what her secret was: she'd stand at the stove and just move it around with a wooden stick very slowly, and that gave it apparently a consistency that other custards didn't have. And oh Lord, the way people loved her custard—.

00:28:32

SR: David, did you know Ga?

00:28:32

DO: Yeah, I knew who she—what year did she die?

00:28:37

AO: Hmm. I make good custard but I don't like it. It was not as good as hers.

00:28:41

DO: Yeah. I knew Ga for several years of my childhood—if I could type...

00:28:54

AO: Oh when did she die? I guess she died—she died in the '70s.

00:28:59

DO: It would have been late—.

00:29:02

AO: Around '75-'72—something like that. She was quite old.

00:29:06

DO: It was later '70s, because I was born in '72 and she was—anyway, I remember her well from my younger childhood, but I can't remember exactly how old I was when she died.

00:29:18

SR: But she was cooking for your grandparents?

00:29:20

DO: Yeah, she was. Yeah, she was working until she was—I mean I think she did less and less, you know as she got old and frail. Right, they eventually wound up basically hiring a helper for Ga to [*Laughs*] sort of continue with the tasks, but yeah. I mean she was around when I was a small child. I remember her you know. She called my father Big Bug and she called me Lil' Bug, and you know she—[*Laughs*]. And yeah, her custard was extraordinary. It was, yeah, it was really good.

00:29:57

SR: I want to ask Annou now about the kind of gumbo that Ga made.

00:30:03

AO: It must have been later than that she died.

00:30:06

DO: It was, yeah.

00:30:06

AO: Yeah, she was in her 80s when she died. She made both the okra and the filé, but she would not put both in one—in the same gumbo. We had either okra gumbo or filé gumbo. And I think the difference—now, most gumbos are good, except nowadays they put too much pepper in them. But I think the difference between the old-fashioned and the new-fashioned was there was more okra. And I think the reason there was more okra was because there was time to cook the okra. It took a long time to move that okra around and get enough of the fluid out of it, so it

wasn't sticky. And she had time because, I mean in those days the maids and the cook—not only the maid—they didn't work all day. They cooked for dinner; they cleaned house in the morning; they did what was needed doing, but they had time to cook. And so she would take her time and she would cook. So it wouldn't burn on the bottom, and she'd take her good time and cook the okra, and it was really delicious. I mean, mmm, really good.

00:31:29

SR: Can you ask her what would go in—what else would go in the okra gumbo, and what would go in the filé gumbo?

00:31:48

AO: Well in the okra gumbo you could either make a Friday gumbo, which had only seafood, or you could make a gumbo that you're not going to serve on a Friday, and you could put some, oh, chicken with the seafood, or some sausage. So it—there was more a variety if you were going to have it some other time during the week. Then the filé gumbo, well we mainly had filé gumbo when there was turkey left; you would use the carcass of a turkey. I mean we always had filé gumbo after Christmas or Thanksgiving, because that was the carcass of the turkey, and it was really—turkey is gumbo is delicious.

00:32:36

SR: What about a roux? Would there be a roux in those two gumbos?

00:32:48

AO: Oh yes, oh yes.

00:32:49

SR: In both?

00:32:49

AO: Both of them had a roux definitely, but we didn't use a very dark roux the way the Cajuns do. Many Cajuns use a very dark roux. In fact we never used a very dark roux for anything.

00:33:03

SR: What shade—what color would she compare it to?

00:33:15

AO: Oh much darker than that, but not dark brown, like hair. It would be—**[Laughs]** I say if we were going to talk about hair, it would be like light brown hair. Oh, that's a really bad analogy isn't it? **[Laughs]** But that was the color—Jeannie with the light-brown hair roux. **[Laughs]**

00:33:35

SR: Would they—would she put tomatoes in it?

00:33:41

AO: A little bit. Ga would put—for gumbo for six people or eight people—'cause when she cooked it for us she'd cook it for herself and her husband and her sister, maybe—she would put

several tablespoons of tomato paste. She didn't put whole tomatoes. She only put tomato paste, and that was just to give it—it was more like a seasoning than an ingredient.

00:34:11

SR: What about, can you ask her about herbs? I know that she's fond of thyme.

00:34:17

AO: She fried that [tomato paste] too. She would fry that with the roux.

00:34:22

SR: The tomato?

00:34:22

AO: Yeah. She didn't use a great variety: she used thyme, she used bay leaf. Every once, for a few things, she used cloves, cinnamon—.

00:34:39

SR: For gumbo?

00:34:41

AO: For gumbo, no. In gumbo, she would put black pepper, thyme. I guess that was about it—wouldn't put cloves in gumbo the way some people do. Cloves, cloves you should use very rarely. They overpower everything. But for some things she did use it. I think maybe they put a

little cloves in crawfish bisque, maybe. I don't really remember—but very strong things. I mean crawfish tasted very strong. You have to talk back to crawfish. I don't really remember, to tell you the truth.

00:35:31

SR: Can you ask if gumbo was an everyday dish, or was it a special occasion?

00:35:36

AO: I didn't do the cooking. No, I didn't do it until I got interested and then I learned how. Whether what? No, we'd often have it on Fridays—very often have it on Friday. It wasn't a special occasion dish. I mean we never had it on special occasions. It was an ordinary dish.

00:36:13

SR: Um—

00:36:14

AO: But it was good. *[Laughs]*

00:36:19

SR: So she mentioned crawfish bisque, and I think that there's a funny story about your mom and crawfish bisque?

00:36:40

AO: I don't know that story. I don't know that story. You'll have to tell that story.

00:36:45

DO: I don't—well I wasn't even—I didn't even exist yet.

00:36:49

SR: Well maybe you can, maybe you can tell me where your dad, who is from New Orleans, met your mom.

00:36:57

DO: Okay. They met, you know—

00:37:00

AO: I don't remember that story.

00:37:02

DO: Okay, I'll tell you this. My parents—my mom is from Virginia, which is—you know, from a Virginia farm, where you know they ate like as simply as you can. And the only spices were, you know, for baking—like salt and pepper, and then spices for baking. And they met in North Carolina when he was at grad school at Duke and she was at grad school at UNC. And the first time—the story as I recall, was the first time that she came to New Orleans to meet my grandparents, and his parents, they put on you know—wanted to make a big impression—and cooked crawfish bisque. And my mom was just completely mortified that you know, this dish

with these weird red bugs, you know, [*Laughs*] kept poking up at her with this—[They were] very expectantly awaiting her response, and I think she had to just try to, you know, act like it was wonderful even though she was terrified. [*Laughs*]

00:38:10

SR: Because—can you explain the presentation of crawfish bisque, the traditional?

00:38:14

DO: Well it's—it's just the crawfish sitting there staring at you.

00:38:17

SR: In the shell, right?

00:38:20

DO: Right, exactly. Yeah; it's not just the tail. It's the actual eyes and heads looking up, looking up at you out of the bowl, so yeah. Basically you just had bugs staring at you from your plate, which was very unlike her experience growing up with meat and potatoes in Virginia.

00:38:41

SR: Can you tell Annou that I'm about to ask you some questions about when you would visit your grandparents?

00:38:49

DO: Okay.

00:38:52

AO: I can tell you about Allan, my cousin Allan Hanes.

00:38:55

DO: Okay. [*Laughs*] Oh yeah, yeah. This is a similar story.

00:38:57

SR: Tell us.

00:38:58

AO: You want to hear about Allan?

00:39:00

SR: Yeah.

00:39:01

DO: Allen Stanwix-Hay—a hyphenated name—he was from Florida. His mother was my grandfather’s sister who married an Englishman, moved to Florida—very brave man. He ended up in this, in the Army, and all kinds of awards for bravery. He came to dinner and we had artichokes as a salad—you know when you dip it into oil and vinegar and you scrape off the bottom. Allen from Florida apparently—this must have been around 1935—Allen apparently had

never had artichokes like that before. Maybe they didn't even have them in Florida in 1935. I bet they didn't. So, but we had them in New Orleans you see. Somebody noticed that Allen was eating, not only scraping off the end; he was eating the prickly end, brave Allen. Somebody finally told him, *No, Allen, you just put that on your plate. That's not to be eaten.* But he was brave. He was eating it.

00:40:14

SR: Ouch.

00:40:14

AO: Hmm?

00:40:16

SR: Ouch.

00:40:24

DO: Ouch.

00:40:30

AO: He was a character but very brave and very polite, and see that was—that was the Englishman in him. His father was from England, and if you're English you are totally polite, so he ate them. **[Laughs]**

00:40:54

SR: Okay, tell me about the daube.

00:41:00

AO: You want to hear about our family recipe? Well there's one dish that we cooked that I love, and other people like a lot. I suspect it's Spanish, from the Spanish side. It's a daube with olives. It's beef, preferably chuck, cooked in a—with a sauce with a roux. You cook it like a pot roast with—but only with onions before—and then about 20 minutes before you're going to serve, it you put the olives in. And I think that's the only Spanish remnant of cooking in my background. I think it's Spanish because the other Creoles don't cook that. And you see, not all Creoles are Spanish. But my family happened to be, and I think that must have come down that line.

00:41:54

SR: I do want to ask you some questions, but first could you ask her when she started cooking?

00:42:09

AO: I didn't start cooking until after my older brother decided to cook. He was an excellent cook, and he—oh, oh no. I take it back. When I went to, not Charlottesville—Virginia, where you know where—where your old—?

00:42:39

DO: Skyler?

00:42:40

AO: Virginia—.

00:42:40

DO: I don't know who you're talking about—Jamestown?

00:42:43

AO: Where the old Governor's house is? You know, the first capital of—the first capital of Virginia. James—no.

00:42:54

DO: No, I don't know.

00:42:56

AO: I went to Virginia and I bought a cookbook, and it was of Virginia cooking, and I thought it was so curious because it had a recipe for a brown sauce to be carried about in the pocket. You would cook this down. I guess it was a glaze that you cooked down, and it got hard and you brought it with you and made yourself a sauce wherever you wanted. And I thought, *Gee whiz, these people are really peculiar*. And I just got interested. And then I saw a cookbook by Dionne Lucas, which was on French cooking, and I don't know why—I just bought it. And that got me a little bit interested in non-Creole cooking, which got my older brother interested in cooking generally. He was an excellent cook, and he got to be such a good one, he started his own cooking implements store that sold pots and pans and everything. He was a really good cook.

And then he—well, anyway. And so he had a really good cookbook collection and—and I decided I wanted to cook. And that was when I was in my 20s or 30s. My mother didn't cook then either. She didn't cook—start to learn how to cook until Ga—. Well, when Ga first worked for my grandmother she worked every day of the week, and then my parents thought well, that's not fair. She needs the weekend off. So she got the weekend off. So my mother had to learn how to cook weekend food, which she did. And then as Ga got older, she never retired, but she got a bit frail and so my mother did more of the cooking.

00:44:50

SR: Huh.

00:44:53

AO: Williamsburg. That's where it was.

00:44:56

DO: Yeah, what about Petey [Annou's father] learning to cook Ga's recipes?

00:45:01

AO: My father learned how to boil water and make coffee when he was in his 60s. Then he decided he was going to systematically find out how to cook. He learned how to make hamburgers, and he was so proud of himself that he decided to watch Ga cook and mark down her recipes. So he would go into the kitchen when she was cooking and write down what she used and what she did. And so I have those.

00:45:35

SR: You do?

00:45:35

AO: I don't know how well—I don't know how well he did it. What? But no, he couldn't cook.

00:45:46

SR: Are those recipes secret?

00:45:47

AO: I shouldn't have told anybody?

00:45:49

DO: No, no, no—the contrary.

00:45:59

SR: David is typing, *Are those recipes secret or available to be seen?*

00:46:04

AO: They're on cards. You want copies?

00:46:08

SR: Yeah.

00:46:10

AO: But Sara, I don't know if they're any good. I don't know that he knew what was significant. [*Laughs*]

00:46:20

SR: Have you seen them?

00:46:21

DO: Not to my recollection. I don't think so.

00:46:23

AO: He didn't do that many of them, but I'll—I'll make you some copies one day, or you can come to my house and copy them. [*Laughs*]

00:46:31

SR: I wonder if there is one for gumbo.

00:46:34

DO: Hmm. There might be?

00:46:40

SR: Is there a gumbo?

00:46:39

AO: I also have some handwritten recipes of my mother's. I don't know. I never looked at them. I didn't trust my father one bit. **[Laughs]** He was really funny about that.

00:46:59

SR: That is funny. His name was Petey?

00:47:02

DO: His name was Victor, but I called him Petey, and the kids called him Petey, which was fairly typical. I have no idea who called him—that's how I knew him. I mean, I barely knew that his name was Victor, but the adults called him Victor. Who called him Petey?

00:47:25

AO: This is ridiculous. His name was Victor William. As a child I think he was called Pete. Why Pete? Well in New Orleans, as you know, people are called by nicknames that have nothing to do with their real names. In his case it was particularly ridiculous because he had an Uncle Pierre. Pierre Olivier is Peter Olivier, who was called Uncle Pete. It makes no sense. And then the children just started to call him Petey. We called him Petey. My older brother and I didn't call him father or dad or papa. We called him Pete until we were about 12--15 years-old, and then we decided that wasn't proper and we started to call him Papa. **[Laughs]**

00:48:22

SR: What about Annou's name? So she introduced herself at the beginning as Anne?

00:48:28

AO: Creoles tended to call all generations by their—by their first names. I mean I would call my aunts Lou, Doucette. And we'd call the great-aunts by nicknames: Nanan, Lalie. Lalie was her nickname [full name Eulalie] and she was my great-aunt.

00:48:48

DO: What about Annou?

00:48:53

AO: Oh, my cousin Noel nicknamed me Annou when I was a child.

00:49:02

SR: Huh.

00:49:04

AO: Just out of anywhere, you just made up names. My mother's grandmother, the Spanish one, had the worst nickname of all: Gargomme. [*Laughs*] Isn't that awful?

00:49:21

SR: How do you spell that?

00:49:22

AO: I don't think it meant anything, but that's what she was called. Real Spanish aristocrat. I don't spell it. *[Laughs]*

00:49:38

SR: That's okay. Okay, so David: so you grew up mostly in Virginia?

00:49:46

DO: A bunch of places but mostly Virginia—more Virginia than anywhere else, yeah.

00:49:51

SR: So what are some of your first memories of coming down here to visit?

00:49:56

DO: I mean I would come here once or twice a year. All my—you know all my childhood since—and I don't have any sort of first memory, but I just remember we would come usually at some point every summer and then fairly often for Christmas. I mean it was just—I think I first came here when I was nine-months or something but—. *[Laughs]* Yeah, you know, so I don't remember any first starting point but—.

00:50:25

SR: Well what about—well first of all I guess I should ask, did your dad cook New Orleans food in Virginia, or did your mom learn?

00:50:33

DO: There was some of that. I mean, you know it certainly wasn't in any way like primarily New Orleans food, you know. I mean they cooked sort contemporary American, and then we also moved around a lot—you know, we were in Africa, and they'd pick up like—. They liked to cook, you know a variety of things, but I mean there was some New Orleans food. I'm trying to think of—my mom did more of the day-in and day-out cooking, and she actually—so she, for example, she cooked a gumbo. Like the gumbo that I had the most as a kid was her version of the gumbo, you know. And she, you know being Virginian, hadn't grown up cooking or eating gumbo. But she as an adult had—and I have no idea how she came on to her version of it. I don't know if it was through recipes or through talking to someone. But she cooked like, a sort of a brothier kind of—I think it was chicken and oyster maybe. There was definitely oysters—. And then I think it was maybe chicken, and it was a sort of thinner, brothy, you know much brothier than the sort of thick sort of roux-intensive kinds of things down here. So it's, you know, a lighter thing.

00:52:06

SR: Did it resemble the kind of gumbo you would have at your grandparents' house?

00:52:10

DO: Well it was, again I mean it was—it was a different style, and it was—because it wasn't the sort of opaque brown gumbo. It was—it was just lighter, you know but it was good. It was just sort of her version of it, you know. That was her take on it.

00:52:31

SR: And so what did you think of the food in New Orleans when you would visit as a kid?

00:52:35

DO: Well it was—I mean it was always a really distinct impression, you know, and there was—well, first of all like one thing that was—oh it was a regular deal—was we'd usually have Popeye's the night we flew in. Like we would come to the New Orleans airport, and that was always a very distinctive impression, you know like walking off of—coming in at that airport in December or something. You know it's swelteringly humid compared to Virginia, but then usually Popeye's was the sort of typical routine for the night we would get there. But then I mean in general the—the really sort of memorable impression was just that it was just a style of eating that is very rare now. I mean even beyond just actual specific contents of the food, the whole mode of eating was very different. First of all they ate really early—they ate like, you know 5-something every night. You know, so—. And it was—the table was always, like it was always this elaborate—it wasn't super formal, but it was just very much more elaborate than anything that we normally did. The table was always set, you know, and there was always the ritual of setting the table and putting in an extra eve. And then, you know the multiple courses that—always a soup course, there was always a salad, there was always bread on the table, there was always pitchers of water on the table. And the, like the soup might be just Campbell's. I mean it

wasn't—so the specific things weren't always fancy in and of themselves, but it was, you know the—it was always a multi-course event with—you know, and always some dessert. So it was a strong impression compared to, you know the usual one-course sit-down American dinner.

00:54:59

SR: And did—did they eat like that when you weren't there, or is that just because you were there?

00:55:02

DO: Yeah—no, no that was every night. That was just standard. That was, yeah—no that was not any sort of special occasion. That was just the normal—. Oh, and they always said grace. So dinner was a big deal every night, and yeah that was the standard. Something like Popeye's was the sort of, you know fun exception, really. You know you didn't do all that: you just had the Popeye's. But, yeah, it was a nightly ritual.

00:55:37

SR: And Ga would be cooking at that point?

00:55:39

DO: Yeah. I mean again, I mean that was the first years of my childhood—she would be involved in the cooking. I mean again, you know I was a small kid so I kind of can't remember the details but yeah. I mean it would be Ga and my grandmother, and then I guess later on just my grandmother—I guess yeah, in the kitchen.

00:56:04

SR: And so did you grow up identifying as a Creole?

00:56:08

DO: That's—you know, that's a complicated question. I mean, huh; that's a funny question. I mean I always really liked, you know the culture. I always found it very appealing, but then my mom is from Virginia and—and then we moved around to all sorts of places when I was a kid. So it's not like I was, you know—I was definitely something of an outsider to that culture. On the one hand I sort of had a lot of exposure to it, but it wasn't like—. I'd come down here to my cousins' and they'd all—you know they all went to mass every Sunday; totally involved in—you know went to Catholic school, and just did all these things that were definitely very different from my life. So it was definitely, you know, some sense of an outsider. But it's, for whatever reason, kind of the way it's played out. I mean, yeah obviously, I wound up moving here. I hadn't anticipated, hadn't planned on moving here, but you know I obviously wound up moving here, and it's kind of managed to—I mean, I identify more, I guess more strongly with my New Orleans, you know, lineage than anything else even though it's not—even though I didn't grow up immersed in it.

00:57:52

SR: But what about now?

00:57:53

DO: Well I mean, that's what I mean. I guess I feel like I've wound up being—although I mean the Creole culture, I mean it's very much—it's on the wane you know. I mean it's—I mean it's basically sort of ceasing to exist, or at least in its form that it did. You know their generation, they grew up in a primarily Creole world. I mean I guess that--that's what I mean is the difference: that when they were kids, you know everyone they knew—well not everyone—but like all around the neighborhood is a Creole neighborhood. And you know there's other people too. But there was, you know, up and down the street—you went to school with kids with French last names. And then even when I was—when I would come here and visit as a kid, like until I was 18 I think, I mean literally until I was an adult and would come and visit on my own and kind of go out and you know see the city on my own a little more, I really thought that like everyone in New Orleans was, you know, French ancestry. **[Laughs]** I mean I didn't really understand that it was—because basically with, you know growing up and coming here, what I knew was like old Creole biddies, you know, their funny smelling old houses in random corners of the city. **[Laughs]** So even—as a small kid coming and visiting, I was sort of seeing what was kind of—and well now a lot of that's gone. I mean a lot of those people have died off, or you know are—there's still some of the older generations around, but you know the kids are going off to other places to college and marrying non-Creoles, you know. So it's—it's kind of fading into the—you know, into everything else. So yeah, I mean for me it's like I definitely feel a strong affinity for that culture, and you know a very strong affection and strong affinity for the New Orleans culture, and you know I feel like a lot of its elements have influenced me, but it's not—it's certainly a different thing from what it was. It's not that kind of, you know, close-knit community of Creoles all going to each other's houses and you know, that type of thing.

01:00:45

SR: Well what about—I mean for gumbo, for example? I lived in New Orleans for almost seven years—or anyway, around there. I learned how to make gumbo, but when I make gumbo I’m—I’m not digging deep into some taste memory. I know you make gumbo. Are you, or does it feel like a very recent acquisition?

01:01:20

DO: Well it’s—I think that the gumbo sort of reflects the broader thing. It’s a sort of dual answer, is that I didn’t grow up, you know, at some apron strings. You know as a man I wouldn’t have—even if I had grown up here, I probably wouldn’t have been the one getting the instruction in the kitchen anyway. But I mean I can’t claim that like when I cook gumbo today it’s because I watched—I have memorized, you know, **[Laughs]** what Gaga was doing over the stove or anything like that, because I don’t have that kind of detail. You know I was a kid, when I was—so I mean when I cook gumbo now I look at recipes. But—but at the same time I’m referencing also— But—but at the same time I’m referencing also—although the specific technical information of how to make a gumbo I had to, you know, reassemble as an adult from recipes and whatnot. But what I have is a sort of very specific idea of what they should, you know, be like. So I’ll sort of, you know, look at several recipes and be like *No, I don’t like that. Yeah, that’s correct and that’s wrong.* You know, and sort of edit them to reflect what I think the end result should be. I mean—it wasn’t the sort of detailed direct transfer of you know, culinary knowledge, but I mean—you know people have since I was a small child told me about making rouxs. **[Laughs]** I mean Annou would lecture me about how to make a roux, and you know Petey would lecture me about how to make—you know—. My father would lecture me about how to

make a roux. It's, you know, this thing that people like to, I guess, lecture small children about.

[Laughs] You know, so I have always known that you stir it constantly. **[Laughs]** So then I—so there's definitely referencing strong memories if not, you know, like detailed technical knowledge of how to make it.

01:03:54

SR: Well that's very interesting to me. Do you lecture your daughters on how to make a roux?

01:03:57

DO: Not yet, but I'm sure I will.

01:03:59

SR: Will you ask Annou if she remembers lecturing on how to make a roux?

01:04:03

DO: I'm sure. It probably was her 'cause she likes to lecture me about everything, so—.

01:04:18

AO: No, I don't remember that. I might have told you. I would never lecture—would I?

[Laughs]

01:04:30

DO: Fair enough.

01:04:30

SR: Ask her what she would say if she were to lecture to someone on how to make a roux.

01:04:42

AO: I would say, *Now David, this is very tricky. You must take great care. You take half oil of some sort.* If this were 1930 I'd tell you to use lard but that's out of the question these days. I don't think they even make lard anymore.

01:05:14

DO: Yeah.

01:05:16

AO: But you would use one-part oil to one-part flour. And you would heat the oil and get it good and hot, but not terribly hot, add the thing and then stand there—again, stand and move it around, with probably a flapjack flipper. And you just moved it around so it wouldn't burn until it got to be the color you wanted. When Ga made it, she was really good: she would make it for the week. And that meant it was going to be about at least a half-inch thick in a large frying pan. And she didn't burn it. I mean she knew what she was doing. And it would—it would *plop!* It was the right—it was the right temperature when it sort of plopped merrily like that.

01:06:19

SR: She would use an audio cue?

01:06:28

AO: But you had to have a lot of it for it to plop. I mean that was a really good cook who could do that. I don't know what kind of cue she used. I mean—. You could see it though. I mean it was thick and—and it would kind of puff up really. And so it just sort of danced. That's what it looked like to me. You can ask her when you go to heaven, if you go to heaven. **[Laughs]**

01:07:07

SR: That sounds intimidating.

01:07:06

AO: I guess you will because she's up there praying for you.

01:07:10

DO: Okay, that's sweet.

01:07:11

AO: She loved you. I told you she loved everybody. **[Laughs]**

01:07:18

SR: What kind of—can you ask Annou what kind of fat Ga used: lard or—?

01:07:26

AO: She took time, that's the thing. She was—she took time to cook. She liked to be a good cook. Lard—don't ask me what lard is. I think it's beef fat, and it's very bad for you but it tastes good.

01:07:46

SR: What did she—can you ask if she used—

01:07:49

AO: It would come in a slab and it was white and you'd just take a spoonful and put it in the frying pan and make your roux.

01:07:59

SR: Did she use stock or water?

01:08:02

AO: You can make it with olive oil and you can make it with butter, but we didn't. We didn't. My grandmother may have used the olive oil. I—I don't really know. She might have. She used a lot of olive oil. In what—?

01:08:19

DO: In gumbo?

01:08:22

AO: In gumbo, water because you see you—you got—and you put a lot of seafood in it, for instance. It would make a nice rich gumbo. It wouldn't need a stock.

01:08:41

SR: What about—I'd like to ask about restaurant gumbos today. Are there any restaurant gumbos that she thinks, that Annou thinks are proper?

01:08:55

AO: I guess if you made a chicken gumbo you could add stock. That would be good. Well I'm going to make up one: don't put as much pepper in it as they put these days. You should not overpower the taste of the ingredients with your herbs and things.

01:09:26

SR: Okay. So—okay, Annou is answering the thing about are there any gumbo rules that shouldn't be broken?

01:09:33

AO: Don't burn the okra. *[Laughs]*

01:09:36

SR: What about restaurants in New Orleans?

01:09:42

AO: No, but then nobody's gumbo tastes like anybody else's. No, I had a wonderful gumbo once at Antoine's, and it was very similar to Ga's except that it was not as thick. They must have put more oyster water—oh, that was what you would put besides regular water. If you—and we usually had oysters besides the shrimp—and you would save the oyster water and use that for part of the water anyway. And that's what made it delicious. Of course nowadays you just don't see an oyster too much in gumbo that you buy, so it's bound to be very different than what we had.

01:10:34

SR: What about the consistency of the gumbo? Can I ask about that?

01:10:48

AO: I guess ours were thicker than most people's, but I think that was because Ga put more okra. She just—not because it was gooey; it was just more okra. It wasn't—how do you remember it, David?

01:11:05

DO: I was a kid. I don't know [*Laughs*]. I mean I remember it being thick—.

01:11:13

AO: There was more okra than you'll find today, and there was more oysters.

01:11:22

SR: Hmm. What kind of gumbo do you make, David?

01:11:24

DO: I usually make like a chicken and sausage gumbo—filé, and again I mean—yeah, that's it.

[Laughs]

01:11:37

SR: So I know that you have a Cajun friend who makes really good hen gumbo.

01:11:44

DO: Well Mary, she made a really good turkey gumbo, yeah, and then—yeah, and she makes a really, really dark roux, so hers is you know like dark chocolate.

01:11:59

SR: Do you take any cues from her?

01:12:02

DO: I mean I've seen her make it, but I can't claim—. I don't know how she does it. She makes it really dark.

01:12:12

SR: Can you ask Annou when she became aware of Cajun culture in cooking?

01:12:20

AO: I think after the Second World War. There were always Cajuns in New Orleans, and I went to school with some children who now I realize had Cajun names, but we didn't know their families really. You see we really knew other Creole families. And then after the war, I think that's when they started to move into New Orleans more and—at least that's the way I remember it. I'm not sure that's true, but I'm pretty sure it's true. That's—at least that's when I became aware of it, maybe because the Cajuns—men—were drafted into the Army, and they left and they saw the world and they liked the city and came to New Orleans. I suspect there was a good bit of that.

01:13:18

SR: Did Annou eat boiled crawfish growing--growing up?

01:13:28

AO: No, never. I never had boiled crawfish. I read not so long ago that it was during the middle '30s that one of the government agencies decided that would be a good cash crop for the Cajuns because, of course, times were terribly hard when I was young and they needed to make money. And so they had—the government, the federal government encouraged to start using—of selling more crawfish, and that's when people—I guess they were the first ones to eat boiled crawfish. So I asked some of—one of my cousins, my father's cousin, if they had had crawfish. She said, well sometimes they would have boiled crawfish for lunch. But she didn't have it—they didn't have it very often. It was unusual for them. But they had crawfish bisque and we had crawfish bisque, but that was rare. Cooking crawfish bisque, really to do it well took a day. You had to

buy the live crawfish, and they had to be live because you needed the heads. You couldn't buy the crawfish tails plus heads. You still can't buy that. Which meant you would have to buy the live crawfish, take them home, boil them yourself, which was a very unpleasant thing that many people hated to do—oh sure, killing those poor little creatures. Then they had to be—they had to be cleaned, and then you had to make the stuffing, and they had to be stuffed and you had to make a big roux. So it used to take my mother—my mother would help with that. Mama and the cook would take pretty much of a day to make crawfish bisque. But when we had crawfish bisque, they didn't give you three heads. You would have as many heads as you wanted, which was more like 10 or 12. It was a meal. We would have a salad with that, and that was a meal. I didn't mention about meals. We had typically—had a six-course meal everyday. Yeah, I thought I should mention that because I didn't realize that was unusual until our neighbor, who is from the country—her children would come to dinner at our house sometimes. She said that her children would come home *épatée*, just astonished that we would have a six-course meal every day of the week. We had soup. We had salad. We had a cook—at least one cooked vegetable, maybe two. We had a starch. We had meat or fish, and we had dessert every day. Then when Ga didn't come on the weekends, that started us having simpler meals when my mother was doing the cooking on Saturdays and Sundays.

01:16:42

SR: Wow.

01:16:42

DO: And I forgot to mention that also when I've come and see these meals—

01:16:45

AO: And that was typical. That wasn't just my family. That was typical Creole—white Creole.

01:16:53

DO: There- would also—when I would come to visit, it wasn't just this six-course—

01:16:56

AO: Right?

01:16:55

DO: Oh yeah—this six-course meal, but also there would be things like tomato aspic, which I never in my life ate tomato aspic except for when I came here. [*Laughs*]

01:17:07

SR: What about coffee? You have a collection of demitasses, and is that related to something?

01:17:15

DO: Well they—the first ones are from the family that, yeah, I got a few of the demitasses. They would just, you know brew the really strong coffee and chicory and the standard—so although during the day they would drink it with, I guess—I'm trying to remember. I think typically they would drink it with milk and sugar—and I don't remember if they drank coffee after dinner like a regular, on regular nights. But it's still the case, like with family gatherings,

that you know after like Christmas dinner or Easter dinner, that coffee is served. And it's served in demitasses with sugar and—so yeah, I inherited several demitasses, and then somehow—yeah, I somehow have amassed a ridiculously large collection of them. I don't know how many, but I've wound up with a very large collection of demitasses. But yes, it did start with the few that I inherited from the family originally.

01:18:28

SR: Can you ask Annou if the family had coffee after dinner on a regular basis?

01:18:37

DO: That may have been more a Sunday dinner thing...and daytime...

01:18:45

SR: Nighttime doesn't keep you from having coffee.

01:18:46

DO: No, not—not me, no.

01:18:48

AO: Oh after dinner, oh yes. I resented it literally. That turned me into a feminist because—

01:18:55

DO: [*Laughs*]

01:18:57

AO: No, I'm serious, David. My nephew is laughing at me but I'm serious. I would have to make the coffee because Ga would go home after she cooked and she—I mean, why would she have to stay around while we sipped coffee? Although somebody would take her home, but the rest would have coffee. Ga wasn't there, so I would have to make the coffee, which I did not mind. But I had an older brother; he never made the coffee. Was that fair? No. [**Emphasis Added**]

01:19:31

DO: [**Laughs**]

01:19:30

SR: [**Laughs**] Did you drink the coffee?

01:19:34

AO: What? Yes, I would drink a little. I like a little coffee after dinner. Of course the coffee was different, too, in those days.

01:19:49

SR: Yeah. Just to clarify, what was the coffee like? Was it coffee and chicory?

01:20:01

AO: Louisiana coffee and chicory, and Ga would make it with the old coffee pot—two piece—and she would boil the water and put it in tablespoonful by tablespoonful.

01:20:15

DO: And you were asking me about ways in which—whether we had New Orleans food around the house, and again the food was much more of a mix, but the coffee in our house was precisely that. I mean I grew up with very strong coffee and chicory that, you know, that my parents drank with the milk and sugar.

01:20:30

SR: Would they make it in one of those drip pots?

01:20:34

DO: Yeah, they'd have—they had the same exact thing: a big drip pot. And they would just make a batch and drink some of it hot, and then it would sit around and they'd, you know reheat it and drink it throughout the day and then make a new pot whenever that one was out. It just was, you know constantly replenishing a pot of coffee. **[Laughs]**

01:20:58

SR: Sounds a little familiar.

01:20:59

DO: Yeah, right. You wonder where I got my addiction from, but yeah.

01:21:04

SR: Let's see, can you think—I think we should wind this up soon because it's getting late, but can you think of anything that maybe I haven't asked?

01:21:13

DO: Oh I'm trying to think. I'm sure I'll have 10 questions—

01:21:19

SR: I know, it could go on for a long time.

01:21:20

DO: Right [*Laughs*], as soon as you turn it off, but I can't think of anything right now.

01:21:25

SR: Okay. Can you ask Annou if there's something that I'm—I should be asking? Oh, I have—

01:21:40

DO: Okay, one thing just to prove that not all—Creoles are not all super-fancy, and not all—other people have a lot of opinions, but like for example, we will have regular debates or discussions at holiday meals about how to make roux. And I have one cousin who always, always insists that you just need to do it in the microwave and that's—which I don't know.

Maybe it's actually wonderful, and maybe it's not, but you know there is definitely [*Laughs*]
the—the gamut of opinions.

01:22:09

SR: So there are debates in your family when you get together about—?

01:22:12

DO: Yeah, debates, or you know discussions. Yeah, how much—how to make a roux, whether
you can make it in the microwave, all of those things.

01:22:25

SR: I did think of—oh yeah.

01:22:27

DO: And the other is just to decide—Oh, I'd like Annou to answer because I'm curious of what
she has to say about anisette, because the standard—because when I would come as a kid and
visit the—you know I would see the regular weeknight dinners. But then for the—you know
most of my life, and especially as they got older, and after Ga died, it became somewhat less of
the full elaborate production. But you know—but it's still always, the holiday dinners are when I
would see the most kind of intense food rituals, and then still see that as an adult. And it's always
after dinner, it's always the coffee, the black—you know the strong coffee and chicory and the
demitasse, and then anisette is pretty much always served along with that, in tiny little liqueur

glasses. And—and I wanted to ask her about that because somewhere in the family, I believe they used to make anisette.

01:23:34

AO: I don't know if that was just my mother's family or my grandmother or not. Actually I read the other day that brunch is a New Orleans invention, and looking back I think maybe it was. My whole life, when I was young and my grandmother was alive, on Sunday morning she would cook grillades and grits, and then she'd serve anisette at—at the end of the meal. And people would just drop by in the morning after mass and it really was brunch. You see? Now about the anisette, she also served anisette after every big meal—you know, special meal. Now was it because she particularly liked it? I don't really—I think she did, but they even—I have a recipe for anisette. And I think the Creoles just liked anisette.

01:24:36

DO: Did she—did she make her own?

01:24:38

AO: What?

01:24:39

DO: Did she make it?

01:24:41

AO: But she had brunch and maybe—maybe it was invented here. I read that the other day, and I was very much surprised. But there was my grandmother having brunch for whoever stopped by.

01:25:00

DO: Did she make her own anisette?

01:25:01

AO: Well maybe she—I think maybe she did when she was younger and—. But one Christmas my—she had everything, you know. When you're old there's nothing you need; one Christmas she got half a bottle—half a dozen bottles of anisette. *[Laughs]* Oh listen, there's one other thing I should tell the world about Creole cooking: they murdered cooked vegetables. They overcooked everything. Also, broccoli was unheard of. I don't think it was even sold in New Orleans. That was a post-War vegetable that came in with the Americans.

01:25:43

DO: And the asparagus was always canned and—canned asparagus.

01:25:48

AO: But really I—we killed them, poor veggies.

01:25:51

DO: Yeah, canned asparagus—actually I—

01:25:53

AO: But we had the fresh salads every day, so—

01:25:54

DO: I specifically like canned asparagus just because—

01:25:57

AO: Didn't we?

01:25:57

DO: Yeah, you did, yeah. I specifically liked canned asparagus just because I grew up eating it at their house, and that's why yesterday at Mandina's, when it was on my salad I was like, *All right, canned asparagus, yeah.* [**Laughs**]

01:26:07

SR: Authentic.

01:26:07

DO: Yeah, exactly.

01:26:09

SR: Can you say for the record what anisette is?

01:26:13

DO: Okay, it's a licorice anise flavored liqueur—sweet.

01:26:22

AO: Creole cooking did not have good baking except for French bread, and I think really it was the Germans who generally made that: the Leidenheimers, the Heebes. And we did not have good baking. I think it was because it was just too hot to bake. So we didn't have lovely pastries like the French did.

01:26:45

SR: What about rice? Was that an every meal thing?

01:26:50

AO: What else didn't we have? I know I was delighted by the baked goods in—when I went to live in Washington. There was all variety—really good stuff. We only had white rice.

01:27:04

SR: A lot?

01:27:04

DO: A lot, often?

01:27:07

AO: We had rice often, often. And one thing I did not have to eat when I was a child was—was rice pudding. I couldn't take it. I didn't have to eat that, and I didn't have to eat turnips, which we didn't have too often.

01:27:31

DO: I'm sorry—What about Dadie's pain perdu? Did you eat that or—?

01:27:37

AO: Well it was really Ga's.

01:27:40

DO: Ga used to make it?

01:27:42

AO: Huh, it was Ga. She taught my mother how to cook.

01:27:46

DO: Oh interesting.

01:27:45

SR: Who is Dadie?

01:27:47

DO: Oh, Dadie is Claire, my grandmother.

01:27:54

AO: Look—oh, I should say this too. Roy Guste, from Antoine's, his cookbook is really authentic Creole cooking. Now he has some really fancy stuff we never had, like venison. But it's an excellent Creole cookbook. I mean I use it sometimes because, well for instance I would put maybe one more egg than he puts in the custard—little adjustments like that. But basically that is real Creole cooking. And his grandmother loved my mother's meringues. I didn't tell you about those?

01:28:39

DO: Oh those were good.

01:28:39

AO: My mother made meringues 'cause it's, you know, egg white and sugar and a little—a tiny bit of salt and a tiny bit of vanilla. My mother made the best—no, what do you call that stuff that makes it as hard as a rock? Most—I mean most—that's all she used was sugar, egg white, and what is that other stuff they put in? She never used that. Mrs. Alciatore thought they were wonderful, which my mother was so proud because she was not really much of a cook. **[Laughs]**

01:29:19

SR: That's a brave thing to make in this humidity.

01:29:22

DO: Uh-huh.

01:29:21

AO: And she—people thought she was—she had a secret, but it was purely judgment. She had no secret. She just knew how long to whip the egg whites, when to put the sugar in, how fast to put the sugar in, what she meant by a peak, and it was purely a matter of judgment. And that was the same thing with Ga with everything she made. She—and my darling Sarah, David's wife, they know how to cook. It's intuitive. They have judgment from their own experience, and you cannot put that in a cookbook.

01:30:08

SR: It's interesting to me that they're considered Ga's recipes, even though they came from your grandmother's mother a lot of times?

01:30:20

DO: Uh-hm. Yeah, exactly, but—

01:30:21

AO: I should tell Sarah how to make those. I'll bet she could do it.

01:30:25

DO: I bet she could.

01:30:27

AO: Nobody in my family could make them as well as mama.

01:30:32

SR: What about Ga's pain perdu [lost bread]?

01:30:33

DO: Well, see again I think of it as—I would say Dadie's, my grandmother Claire, Annou's mother, because I don't—I mean maybe Ga made it for me when I was younger, but I remember it as a special treat of, you know, my grandmother would make it. And that was like, you know a big kid indulgence was to make pain perdu. And you know I didn't know at that point it's French toast. I mean I realize now it's essentially very similar, but it was, you know she would use stale New Orleans French bread, like stale po-boy bread. And it really was stale, and you know it just had a sort of a perfect custard consistency. And I've tried—and I've—I'm getting there. I haven't quite recreated it, but I'm working on it. But—but it was just very simple, just milk and egg white and sugar—I mean milk, egg, and sugar. But it was you know, the perfect sort of golden brown on the outside and perfectly custardlike on the inside. And then—and just—it was just confectioner's sugar, just powdered sugar, and she would make just a large plate of that. I mean I don't know, eight, ten of them [*Laughs*] for—for me. And I would just sit there and go crazy.

01:31:56

SR: No syrup?

01:31:58

DO: No. Yeah, absolutely no syrup. And again I don't—as I've been trying to make it again as an adult, I keep on coming across other recipes for them, and they put in you know nutmeg and vanilla and various spices. And when I first started making them I would make them from those recipes—that always tasted way too flavored for me. I don't think, unless I'm mis-remembering, I don't think they used any of those sorts of seasonings, because I think it was just very basic. And that's the way I wound up making it, and it comes out much more to what I think it should taste like. So you know, it's just perfect--. **[Laughs]** Yeah, it's really good.

01:32:44

SR: Anything else?

01:32:48

AO: I'm trying to think of bad food we had besides vegetables—cooked vegetables. We didn't have—

01:32:56

DO: And again we had a lot of Campbell's soup, you know.

01:32:59

AO: What didn't we have? I don't know. I miss it. I really miss the food we had when I was young. And you can't cook like that for one person.

01:33:16

DO: Uh-um, no.

01:33:18

AO: And you just absolutely have to have a lot of time. That's the big rule. You have to take your time.

01:33:33

SR: Okay, thank you.

01:33:34

AO: Oh, oh. I really miss it. *[Laughs]*

01:33:39

SR: I don't blame you. Thank you for your time.

01:33:49

AO: Thank you for your interest, my dear. If this teaches anybody anything, tell them take your time.

01:34:00

SR: Well it's out there now. Thanks, David.

01:34:03

DO: Uh-hm.

01:34:05

[End Olivier-Gumbo Interview]