

**CHARLOTTE JENKINS & KESHA ANTONETTI**  
**Gullah Cuisine – Mount Pleasant, South Carolina**

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Interviewer: Sara Wood

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

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**00:00:01**

**Sara Wood:** I'm going to introduce you guys. So this is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance and it's Monday, July 15, 2013 and I'm here at Gullah Cuisine in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina with Kesha Antonetti and Miss Charlotte Jenkins. And for the record I'm going to have — since there's three women and one mic we're going to just kind of do the best we can with this. I'm going to have you Miss Jenkins start by introducing yourself and telling me your name and where we are right now.

**00:00:29**

**Charlotte Jenkins:** Yes; my name is Charlotte Ascue Jenkins and I'm at the restaurant, Gullah Cuisine. It's a Lowcountry restaurant on 1717, Highway 17 North, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina.

**00:00:44**

**SW:** And for the record could you tell me your birth date?

**00:00:46**

**CJ:** September 10, 1942.

**00:00:50**

**SW:** And Kesha could you do the same thing — introduce yourself and tell me who you are?

**00:00:54**

**Kesha Antonetti:** Hi, I'm Kesha Antonetti and I am here at the Gullah Cuisine Lowcountry restaurant. My date of birth is November 20, 1967, but I don't look that old.

**00:01:09**

**SW:** No, you don't.

**00:01:10**

**KA:** No.

**00:01:10**

**SW:** Not at all. I just wanted to start and get a little bit of your background. I read your book; it's really a beautiful book. And I'm wondering if you could talk about where you grew up and what it was like growing up there?

**00:01:24**

**CJ:** Well I grew up in — about eight miles from this restaurant, a place called Awendaw — that's A-w-e-n-d-a-w — and it was very — it was very rural during the time. We grow our own vegetables. We had — we raised pigs and we — we raised — at one point we had cows and we milked cows, which I never get a chance to milk cows, and our own chickens and you know we would — well, the local fishermen would come around and we would buy fish. So we were more or less sort of self-contained to a certain point. We would go to Charleston like maybe once or twice a month to get some staple food like your rice and grits and stuff like that.

**00:02:12**

**SW:** And you grew up in the Gullah tradition and the culture is that correct?

**00:02:15**

**CJ:** Oh yes; I grew up in the Gullah tradition, yeah. [*Laughs*]

**00:02:17**

**SW:** Can you talk about what that was like or what that means? I know you get asked this quite often.

**00:02:23**

**CJ:** Well I would say that was like humble beginning. You know I grew up in a house with about eighteen you know — it was about eighteen; it was a large family, due to the fact that you know a relative got ill and my mother take on you know family members. And it was like — it was very — we had to share everything, clothing and stuff like that. And also with the food, and I think it helps by growing our food.

**00:02:56**

But during this — during — we would work when school closed, we would work on the farm to make money for our school clothing and that was really hard you know. I — but you know at the end of the day we were able to buy our own school clothing and have a little money to spend.

**00:03:18**

**SW:** And what were your parents' names?

**00:03:20**

**CJ:** My—my father was Lawrence — Lawrence Ascue and my mother was Julia Geathers Ascue.

**00:03:28**

**SW:** And she is who you learned to cook from is that correct?

**00:03:31**

**CJ:** Yes; my mother taught me how to cook and also you know my aunt and my grandmother. You know they all was influence on me cooking.

**00:03:40**

**SW:** What was it like being in the kitchen with them when you were growing up?

**00:03:43**

**CJ:** It was heaven. [*Laughs*] It was heaven because they you know—in looking back, the skill that they had, I mean the technique that they used, you know how would they take something, a little something and make a delicious meal out of it? I mean that was very interesting to me.

**00:04:04**

**SW:** And I read something in the book and I'm wondering—I'm kind of jumping ahead but I'm wondering if you could talk about it—your mother's pots when you started the restaurant you actually used her pots because you didn't have pots.

**00:04:14**

**CJ:** Oh yes; my mother had these huge pots, these pots that I—. You know it was like about the three—the three-gallon pots and when I started the restaurant I bought those pots and I may have a couple of them now and because you know when I opened the restaurant I didn't have any money and I couldn't get any money from the bank then [*Emphasis Added*], so it was pretty rough. And you know it started—started out very small and it's—and it's growed, growed, growed, you know still growing.

**00:04:44**

**SW:** And what year did you start the restaurant?

**00:04:46**

**CJ:** In 1995.

**00:04:49**

**SW:** And you had—had other jobs up to that is that correct?

**00:04:50**

**CJ:** Oh yes; my—my first job was working at the Medical University [in Charleston, SC] as a dietician and then from there after I graduated from high school I went to New York and I was a clinical assistant. And from that you know I got married and I moved back here. But during the time I always you know pursued my love for cooking and I would cook for different little parties and stuff like that. When I came back here I worked for a family business; it was an auto paint and body business and I would you know—we would host—I would host a lot of functions you know to network. And you know from that my cooking skills just got you know better—better. And then I decided to attend Johnson and Wales [culinary school in Charleston, SC] to learn how to do it, you know how to operate a restaurant because I wanted a restaurant.

**00:05:47**

But I went to Johnson and Wales and I graduated in '88 [1988] but my—I decided that catering would be—I would do catering because the restaurant was a risky business. But after doing catering for a little while I was—I—I was awarded a contract with the Fortune 500 and I did that for three years and that kind of got me into the mood of restaurant. So my husband [Frank Jenkins] said to me, you know we—we were operating a restaurant all along. We might as well continue because I was—you know I had the building here doing you know work, catering work out of this building. I was only using a small part of it. And—and finally we opened up the restaurant.

**00:06:30**

**SW:** You said it was risky business and you wanted to do catering at first because opening a restaurant was risky business. Why do you say that?

**00:06:35**

**CJ:** Because it takes a lot of money. I didn't realize that; I mean it—well I was taught that in school how you have to crunch the numbers and stuff like that. But I didn't you know really understand it until after you know being in the business, you know and it's—you know because you know you have you know there's so much things. You have competition and—and you know you have you know waste—you know food waste and all that, so that's costly. So if you don't watch your step you know the door could close on you.

**00:07:11**

**SW:** What—what finally made you decide to do it though given all those risks? Like is this something—this is something you always wanted to do.

**00:07:18**

**CJ:** It was something I wanted to do. *[Laughs]*

**00:07:22**

**SW:** And what was it like when you first started?

**00:07:24**



**CJ:** I enjoyed it. It was—I enjoyed it. It was—it was hard work because my husband and I we did most of the work because when we started it was very small. So we—it was my husband and—and a dishwasher and you know then it escalated and we got a cook helper and you know but he, up until you know he passed away he was the head cook.

**00:07:48**

**SW:** Your husband?

**00:07:49**

**CJ:** Yeah.

**00:07:51**

**SW:** When did he pass?

**00:07:52**

**CJ:** April 19<sup>th</sup> of last year, 2012.

**00:07:57**

**SW:** He’s pretty much a part of the book as well and I wanted to ask you; you guys met in New York but you both—he grew up here as well.

**00:08:05**

**CJ:** He grew up across the bridge, on the other side, a place called Wadmaw Island.

**00:08:14**

**SW:** So how did you guys meet in New York, do you—can you tell that story how you met?

**00:08:18**

**CJ:** Well I met through his cousin. You know his—he had a cousin that lived there in New York and you know we were invited to a party and the cousin said well, I'd like you to meet—meet him, meet him. And we met and that's it. *[Laughs]* And you know we got married and Kesha was born. And then I have another daughter who—her name is Katia and she lives in Chicago. She has you know a son. Kesha has four.

**00:08:48**

**SW:** And what is Katia's last name?

**00:08:51**

**CJ:** Katia's last name now is Thomas, Katia Thomas.

**00:08:55**

**SW:** And Kesha, I'm wondering; you have four sons? They all live here?

**00:08:59**

**KA:** Yes; I have four kids—one girl. The ages are sixteen to eight; recently my youngest had a birthday.

**00:09:09**

**SW:** And I'm wondering how did you—how did you get involved in the restaurant. I mean when did you start? When you were growing up did you cook with your mother?

**00:09:17**

**KA:** I used to watch her cook and I like food. Of course I would cook and mimic some things she made. I would sit on the counter and watch her cook. And then when she went to school she'd come—came back home with these tasty foods and I was like, “Oh, I want to know what that is. Oh that's good and I like it.” So she educated me on kinds of foods and what we could eat at restaurants so we were always savvy on our food. And then you know after I had gone and lived my life and went to school and got a husband, married—whatever I came—I've always come and checked in on them and at one point I was helping with them—with the catering. And then I moved—I finally moved back home. And when I moved back home I got into the restaurant a little bit more in detail with trying to get the catering and sales and getting them up-to-date with the computers which I'm still doing that now and keep them—keeping in with the—with high-tech because tech is taking over, and you know just upgrading with catering and you know trying to sophisticate our style and trying to get us to a point where we can go beyond and show what everybody—you know what the culture is and how we live our culture, because even though Gullah is universal in—in the area, you can find other people that are Gullah they still are raised a different way.

**00:10:41**

Some people didn't share very much; some people had—had so—might have had more or might have not had more and come from humble beginnings into a little bit more wealthier. So we—you know we're just trying to put our mark on it and that's just about it.

**00:10:58**

**SW:** Can you talk about some of the ways you put your mark on it here?

**00:11:02**

**KA:** Well—well of course I had to keep up with the skill so I went to culinary school which was Trident Tech which they have an excellent program. They allow you to do what you need to do. Even though I kept what I had to do at the restaurant and I've always had more experience.

**00:11:22**

The mark that I'm trying to put on it is to not to take it—most of the restaurants around here would take the Gullah influence and change it and make it—tweak it and make it something else—an infusion. Well it's really nice and it's very special but where—when we get away from it we don't actually have the whole of the seed. So once you have the—the grounding of the basics, the basics as simple as it is, is always the best because after putting so much into it, sometimes it becomes a monster and I don't want to serve monsters, so—. That's how I want to put my mark down on it.

**00:12:03**

**SW:** And I'm wondering do you have memories of your grandmother cooking.

**00:12:08**

**KA:** Oh yes; every Sunday we'd have a big meal and it was almost like a buffet. That's why us having a buffet wasn't so different because you would have two to three different meats. You would have ham, turkey, and then holidays you would have some lamb or something. I remember with my grandfather I used to hang around with him all the time and I used to go to the store with him. Everywhere he goes he used to you know help fix people's houses up in the neighborhood. He was a plumber. He was an—he could do anything. And I would hang around with him and then also when we got home, we had to deal with chickens. So you know we did the chickens. We killed the chicken. We killed the hog. And we just did a lot of stuff. And I liked to play in the dirt and the sand and—and run around with them on the outside.

**00:12:58**

And with my grandmother I'm used to staying with her and seeing her cook and helping her shuck corn or whatever because the meal every day is—is a big deal. You have a serious breakfast. If you woke up in the morning you would have fish, grits, some—some kind of ham sometimes, biscuits, some hash browns, well or beef has and I don't like the beef hash thing, but just a lot of food and most of the stuff would be leftovers from that Sunday dinner. And sometimes—and then on the weekends we'll have crab and oysters and all sit down and that night we'll eat crabs and oysters on the weekends on Saturdays until you know—we'd eat until we're full and relaxed.

**00:13:57**

Then come the weekend we'll either have—I'm sorry; I'm going back into the weekends. The weekends would start off our—because after Sunday you'd have stuff from Saturday night which was crabs and oysters, so you could have oysters and grits and oysters with oyster sauce and grits which I'm sure nobody has really eaten it here, so we might introduce that later, and crab cakes as well because we'd pick the crab and have the leftover. So eating there made me enjoy food. And so she—everything she cooked was very good. And the thing about it is she had a woodstove as well as electric as well as gas; she'd cook—she had two stoves in the house. So when you had cornbread it didn't taste like anything else. Cornbread from that; the okra soup from there, any kind of soup or stew that was from the woodstove you would never taste anything like that and we can't even implicate that right now. But if we had a stove we probably could but that was some good food. I can't tell you how good. That probably was food that everybody ate back, back, back, way back because I mean they used open fire.

**00:15:16**

**SW:** And part of it, I mean I read this in the book, but part of it is not wasting anything. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**00:15:25**

**CJ:** Well just like she said, my daughter said, let's say my mother make a dinner on—on Sunday and then she make a baked—a roast chicken or something like that or she—she make a stew chicken, she would in turn chop that chicken up and she would make a hash out of it or she

would make it with rice. And that's how I got my signature dish the Gullah rice. You know we use the chicken and—and the leftover chicken.

**00:15:50**

She does—she made—I'm sorry; she made use of—of everything, you know. And like she said on—on Saturday when we do—when we have like crabs and—and oysters she would pick—you know we would do the oyster and she would make an oyster stew and we'd eat that over grits for that morning, the next morning breakfast.

**00:16:15**

**SW:** And can you talk a little bit about—I wanted, before I forget to go back, I kind of jump around here, but did—I read in the book your husband grew up on a plantation and you grew up on a different plantation, the Beehive Plantation or—?

**00:16:29**

**CJ:** Yeah; the Beehive—yeah. Well my husband grew up on Wadmalaw Island and—and then the area that I grew up on was called the Beehive Plantation. But we—we had you know a different—but you know when I say plantation it was like you know everybody had you know built their own houses, like my father built our house. It was—started out with a—with a board house and then he add blocks you know—blocks and board. And he would add a room about every year until I think it ended up being about probably—probably about twelve—twelve rooms or more; uh-hm. And we had an upstairs. And the upstairs had—was part—was—was separated and then on the—the girls would sleep on one side and the boys would sleep on the opposite side, yeah. But it—it was—and where my husband, where he grew up his—his grandfather had a

very large farm because they grew up on like forty acres of land, the grandfather farmed it—farmed those lands. And they did a lot of work you know and—and the grandfather too raised you know other—you know the grandfather had—had I think about nine—nine kids and then he raised four more. So a lot of them, they had the same situation where they all you know slept together and you know slept together, worked together, eat together. It was just one big family and it was so similar you know. Maybe that’s why we got along because we were married for forty-five years, you know; yeah.

**00:18:09**

**SW:** And why—do—before I forget, do you know his—Frank’s grandmother’s—or grandfather’s name?

**00:18:16**

**CJ:** Yes; his name was Frank Brown. Frank was named after his grandfather.

**00:18:19**

**SW:** Why did you and Frank decide to move back to South Carolina after being in New York?

**00:18:23**

**CJ:** Well he was kind of tired of the rat race in New York. It was such a—you know it’s busy, busy and at the time we only had one daughter, Kesha and he—we—we talked about the fact that how we grew up and that we wanted her to be exposed to some of that. And the only way for us to do that is to move back here.



**00:18:44**

So you know we had planned we decided to move back. When we moved back Kesha was like six years old. So you know she had the opportunity to experience some of that you know, the lifestyle that we had. That's why she knew—I mean she experienced all that with her grandmother and grandfather and all that and I think it was good for her. She—you know because growing up as a teenager, I never had no problem with none—her, nor her sister. You know like how kids go through those changes, no; and I pray and hope that the same thing with her—her kids, because so far my grandkids they're very sweet and no problems.

**00:19:22**

**SW:** Do you have memories of being six and moving back here from New York at all?

**00:19:25**

**KA:** Yes; I did. I—when we moved back here I was excited because I had a lot of cousins already here and of course in New York I didn't have anybody to play with. I don't even remember anybody to play with. I couldn't play outside, but I did have one cousin that actually lived next door to me, so I got to play with him. Of course he was older. But when I got back here I was able to play with my cousins and just like when I would go to my grandmother's house all of my cousins would be there and I mean we had five or six of them. So that gives you a lot of independence. That gives you a lot of confidence. So I never had any problem you know in school as well as you know [*Laughs*] with my attitude. So and we all are still close to this day even though we—we all have children and we all still have gatherings and parties. So every time we have a party it's all the cousins and being that I have the most kids [*Laughs*] which I'm the

queen of it, my crew and everyone else who will have about one or two kids, we—we all enjoy each other still you know. We go to—some of us go to the same schools together. We carpool and we eat together, family gatherings. We just had my sister; she had a wedding and of course that was a big—that was a fun thing because a lot of people that came from out of town really enjoyed us. And a lot of people that we know that's outside of our family that we've you know through my travels that I've gained and brought them into my family they absolutely fall in love with the family, some so much that they never leave. **[Laughs]**

**00:20:59**

So we have a good upbringing with that and my kids right now we—we're still doing the same thing. I moved back home because I lived in—I lived in Virginia and Atlanta and I came back home with the kids and rolled right back into our positions of being with your cousins and staying—being with your grandmother and my father was very good with them. He would take them swimming and in fact he taught them how to swim. And so it's a really good enjoyment you know having my family around. And now I also have them working at the restaurant with us. So my older—my two oldest as well as my other two, they like to call themselves working just to get a couple of dollars. But my daughter and my son will help out whenever needed and they do like food as well, so—.

**00:21:49**

My daughter is really interested in cooking. As a matter of fact I think my dad taught her how to cook her salmon because she would like salmon and they do know about food and they do know about eating the right kinds of food as well. And I have one son that's really concerned about the health and food, so he stays on my Ps and Qs with that. He's really funny.

**00:22:11**

**CJ:** Keshon [Bennett].

**00:22:11**

**KA:** Yeah; that’s Keshon. Keshon is the kind of kid that would be like, “Do you know how much calories that have and the fat that’s going to contain and the fat stays on your heart and you can die from that.” He goes into all details.

**00:22:24**

**SW:** And how old is Keshon?

**00:22:25**

**KA:** Keshon is twelve; yes.

**00:22:28**

**SW:** And what are your—what are all your children’s names and how old?

**00:22:32**

**KA:** Okay; my oldest is Kevin [Bennett] and he’s sixteen. My middle—second child is Tatiana [Bennett] and she’s fourteen. My third child is Keshon [Bennett] and he’s twelve and my little youngest one is Jonathan [Antonetti] and he just turned eight Friday so they all keep me busy but they’re a good group. They’re close. And as a matter of fact, my daughter is out in Chicago but—and my eight-year-old son called crying on the phone saying, “When are you coming back

and I miss you,” and they send emails and face time each other. It’s hilarious. But she’s coming back on Wednesday. And I miss her dearly, too, because she’s—even though she’s a pain in the neck sometimes, but she’s my only girl and I miss her.

**00:23:17**

**SW:** Is she staying with your sister?

**00:23:18**

**KA:** Yeah; she’s with my sister helping out with her son because she has—this is her only—first child. Well he’s a little older but she’s got her hands full. You know when you have one child it’s one thing but I have four and they all get along and they keep each other busy but when you have one it—it’s—you got to give them a lot of attention and she’s not up for that. **[Laughs]** She’s up for it but it’s just a little too much for her. So my daughter went up there to entertain her—him for a little while and they got along great and now they’re getting ready to go. I don’t know how they’re going to act because they’re like peas in a pod. So they’re working on a second child—I hope. **[Laughs]**

**00:23:58**

**SW:** I just have a couple more questions for you ladies. Are you okay with time?

**00:24:01**

**KA:** Yeah; we’re fine, yeah.

**00:24:02**

**SW:** I'm wondering—I know this—I'm trying to think of how to phrase this question but how—what's it like to experience learning these traditions from your grandmother and your mother and teaching your daughters and then watching your daughter teach her children? I'm wondering if you could speak to that too just keeping these traditions and watching the interests in your children with these food traditions. What is that like to experience that for you?

**00:24:26**

**CJ:** I think it's a great experience especially that; you know they are interested and they want to learn. Like my granddaughter Tatiana, now she could come in the kitchen and work—work right beside me and she picks up so fast. She can do like her knife skills, she's good at it, and you know she can make different things. She is really good. And—and she's very interested. And then she, too, knows a lot about food you know the—the nutritional value about food. So I think it's good. And I—I'm—I know that when she become a mom will pass that on too, so that's—that's good.

**00:25:02**

**SW:** Kesha what is that like for you?

**00:25:04**

**KA:** It's second nature. I mean I just—you just learn; it's something you just develop. You pick it up. You don't realize you pick it up until someone says, "Hey, this is what you're doing;

you're actually doing it." Then you say, "Oh, okay; well yeah this is what I do. This is what my family is about."

**00:25:19**

You know I—I hope my kids are taken onto it, too. I know my son has helped a little bit. He learns how to do—he can do a mean omelet when he did omelet station and my other son Keeshond who is interested in health he likes to experiment a little bit too much. He's a little bit way out there. He might be the kind of chef that would just throw things together but I don't know. Each of them are—have their own individual you know ways about them.

**00:25:47**

**CJ:** But I think Keshon will be an artist because he's—she's artistic—I mean he—yeah he is artistic I would say. Yeah; he's—no, no, not that—. **[Laughs]** Yeah; he's—he's good at art, so I think that he would play a good part in that if he keeps it up.

**00:26:06**

**KA:** Yeah; he does like art. He's more creative. He's into violin, playing the violin and—and he does drawings and you know he does anything that's anything. He tries anything, so he—pretty much is like a renaissance kind of guy. And my oldest is a technology geek. He gets—keeps me on my toes, so I do know the latest things and the new—the new things. And Jonathan I don't know exactly what it is but he is—he's going to be a character I just know that. And my daughter, right now she's—she's—she feels that she can do anything. She just hasn't decided; it goes from being a doctor to a lawyer to a—a—she said she doesn't want to be a cook or a chef.

She said she'd rather own it. So they do have their own **[Laughs]**—they have their own—their own minds, so I can't just influence them and tell them that you're going to run the restaurant.

**00:27:05**

Everyone is always saying that, “You're going to run the restaurant and you're going to run the restaurant,” but I said to them that you can do anything you want to do. Just do as you please, but know what you learn and if you need to use that—use it.

**00:27:17**

**SW:** I'm wondering when you first opened the restaurant Charlotte what—how did it—I mean from the moment you first opened the restaurant until now how have things changed for you in terms of the cooking or the—the business aspect or just being here in the community?

**00:27:36**

**CJ:** It changed quite a bit because it went from small to—to large. You know like there are times when we've had you know we have to prepare food for 200 to 500 people, you know and that—you know we didn't do that in the beginning. And there are times when we have a lot of reservations you know and that—we didn't have that in the beginning. So it—it has changed and it's continuing to change and getting busy because you have—we do busloads; you know people call in events and want us to do a tour, tour Charleston and with that tour they want to taste you know the Gullah type food. So they would come in and they would book here. So that was something that you know we prepared ourselves for which we didn't have. You know so it has grown quite a bit.

**00:28:32**

**SW:** And what—how do you think it’s changed the community if it has at all, I mean how the community—what kind of mark it has on the community here?

**00:28:40**

**CJ:** I think it has a pretty good mark on the community but you know again, you know in the—the Afro-American group they—they grew up on this type of food. They cook it all the time, so sometimes it tends to—will not dine in, you know regular because of the fact that you know they’re doing this type of food; wherein if they have like a birthday party or something, a group then they will come in.

**00:29:13**

When people from other parts you know they would want to find this place to dine because they want to try it, you know the different types of food.

**00:29:24**

**SW:** What is it like to watch people experience that for people who you know outside the African American community that these aren't staples for them in particular, like what is it like to watch them experience that?

**00:29:35**

**CJ:** It’s—it’s—it’s interesting because a lot of you know—I go around to the table and I talk to some of my guests and a lot of them, you know they have not tried some of the food. And they try it and they—and they like it. A lot of them have—one thing what a lot of people do is they



read up on you know the restaurant and the food and everything and when they come they more or less know what they want to try. And they will ask the waiter or waitress or ask me, what do I think about it? And they want to know what's—what's good and all that and we tell them. But I think that they're amazed with it you know because when—when we first opened I changed the style of cooking a little bit from the first open because of the—the health issue. You know they were saying that you know you got to cook more healthier. And I pulled away like from—the pork from collards and I don't cook collards with pork now and a lot of people don't even miss it. Some people do. And I try to prepare a little more healthy food. We do vegetable medley and then you know the fresh vegetables we just like sauté and steam it. We do roasted vegetables and I think people like that.

**00:30:53**

Our red rice, we—we don't put no sausage in it. It's all vegetarian, so you know and we're going to do more of that.

**00:31:05**

**SW:** Does—does that break your heart just a little bit that you have to take some of those things out because those are—that's authentically how it's made or—?

**00:31:12**

**CJ:** A little bit you know but then there are times when you do catering you know you can have it either way. You know it's not like totally because if someone comes in and you know we have a different style of you know—there's the Southern-style and then there's you know the true, the Gullah-style and Southern-style you know. You could—you know we do that sometimes.

**00:31:38**

**SW:** Can you explain the difference between the two?

**00:31:41**

**CJ:** Well Southern is—this is my terminology with the Southern-style; Southern-style is seasoned with you know—Southern-style is seasoned with—with a little pork and sometimes it's without pork. Southern-style could be either way. But Gullah-style you know you season it with the pork because this is how the Gullah people eat it you know. But—but then you know Southern and Gullah it's the influence because the—the Gullah people came to the South. They worked on the plantation and then they prepared the food for their—for the owner of the plantation. And the owner—in their diet and the Gullah people diet you know they kind of combined so there's—there's a combination and a blend of Southern, Gullah food.

**00:32:36**

**SW:** Did you want to add anything to that Kesha?

**00:32:39**

**KA:** The only thing that I want to say is that the influences that we've had and I noticed that recently that once she came out with the book and she kind of explained Gullah more, more people would be more open to claiming Gullah as far as before they would say, "No, we don't want to associate with that," because it seemed to be negative which at one point in the light of when you're not in Charleston or not in the South it may look down upon as it—as is your

ancestors of slaves and that means you're still trying to act like slaves. And that's not what it's actually saying. It's just saying we live the way true to ourselves, the way we always lived. And it's no different than what it—what they did back in slavery or in that time.

**00:33:24**

So there's more—a little bit more pride now that we can always say, "Listen; this is how we are and some of us have changed and some of us have evolved, but this is the beginning." So that's the only thing I'm saying. I noticed some restaurants that have soul food. They want to—since we're in Charleston they'll say it's Gullah food because actually they want a difference between what is soul food, what is Southern food, what is Gullah food? Well they all intertwine. It's the way you represent it. So it depends on who is cooking it I would say. That's the only thing I see the influences throughout Charleston that people are taking it and doing you know different things with it and they may call it Gullah, they may call it soul, or they may call it Southern. Southern food has now taken to another stint with commercializing and Southern fried chicken—is it really Southern or it's just fried chicken? It's really just fried chicken.

**00:34:28**

**SW:** How do you ladies feel about some of that? I mean the—

**00:34:33**

**KA:** Well like I said that's commercialized. That's like when we take Mexican food and say it's Taco Bell. "Oh we're going to have Mexican." That means we're having Taco Bell. That's how I see it to a certain degree and then you might go to La Hacienda and taste—it might taste a little bit more authentic. But if you actually ate Mexican food they wouldn't eat—they don't eat that

many—you know they may not eat that. They may eat some of that, a partial to it, just like Chinese and Oriental food and Thai food and—and there’s such a mixture of things that have become something else. We’ve already Americanized everything that we’ve eaten. Everything is Americanized.

**00:35:11**

Even—even Southern food is Southern; that is somebody from the North may come and change it up a little bit and we start eating from that. But everybody comes from different places to make you know this area because they came from different places and not everybody was already here. You had Africans; you had Indians; and we don’t even talk about Indian food because that’s in the—that’s in the culture of Gullah as well. So it’s just such a mixture of things that there’s no—we can continue with labels but they’re pretty much you know they’re pretty much a false, because we can say it’s that just to put it in categories we can do all we want but it—to me, Southern food, Gullah food, soul food, it’s food that we eat in the region. So in this region we eat a lot of seafood. We won’t call ourselves fried chicken kings and queens. We might be crab cake queens and shrimp and grits queens [*Laughs*] but that’s just not only Southern. So Mississippi might not eat grits. Mississippi eats grits with ketchup in it. That’s another story, so that’s my take on this—this food ways of different regions.

**00:36:31**

**SW:** Do you want to add anything to that Charlotte?

**00:36:33**

**CJ:** Not really.

**00:36:35**

**SW:** Before—before I forget I just wanted to ask a couple things; you mean—you both talked about some of the items on the menu but can you talk about some of the—is there anything on the menu that still represents like you feel that are the closest representation to your grandmother or mother, the things you learned from the kitchen?

**00:36:51**

**CJ:** Oh yeah; my—my okra soup and when I do the—that rice, the Gullah rice and the—the shrimp and grits, all that represent my mom, the collard greens, cabbage, you know which I do—all that represents. And all the stew; you know my mother used to make a great beef stew and I take that method with the stew and do oxtail which oxtail is something that you know people love. So I do that, but basically all of that stuff that’s in the cookbook is stuff that my mother prepared, the macaroni and cheese, the candied yams, and apple pies, and all that good stuff, yeah. She did it.

**00:37:44**

**SW:** What do you think she would say to you if she were here to see you in this restaurant and what—and—and to see the legacy continue? What do you think she would—would go through her mind?

00:37:54

**CJ:** She would say, “That’s my girl. Girl you got it.” That’s what she would say because I was very proud you know that I was—had the privilege to have her dine at my table and she was very happy to do it because she knows, she realized that I have picked up something from her. And then when—when she—you know when she sits at the table and once she started eating she says to me, she says—she would point her finger at me and, “You got it girl.” **[Laughs]** That’s her—that was her take.

00:38:30

**SW:** I’m wondering if—if you could talk—there’s one specific moment in the book where you talk about you’re named after your aunt and I believe your mother had to go look after her and you had to cook and it was the first time you were left alone to do that. Can you talk a little bit about that?

00:38:45

**CJ:** Yeah; that’s—that’s what really got me started. My—my aunt Charlotte who was my godmother at the time, she taken ill and she lived in Charleston. So my mother said to my father, said, “Lawrence I have to go take care of sister because she’s not feeling well.” So my father said well, “Who gonna cook?” And I was standing up there and I says, “I’ll cook.” And she—she says, “You’ll cook.” So mom said—my mother said, “Well y’all just do the best y’all can.” Well I did; the first meal I prepared was liver and onion with gravy and rice and my older brother he was very you know particular and everything. And when he sat to the table and he ate that and he didn’t say anything to me. He didn’t tell me it was good but he told my mother; he said, “Mom,

you don't have to rush back because little Charlotte made the liver and grits last night and it was tasting just like yours." And that really made me feel so tall, I—I just felt like well, you know because to—at growing up in Gullah to have someone to give you—pay you a compliment to you know give you a little attention saying that you've done something great and that was my inspiration and I was cooking ever since.

**00:40:17**

**SW:** Was it rare to get complimented? Is that what you're—?

**00:40:21**

**CJ:** Ah yeah. And my mom used to say—tell me you know mom used to give me compliments but I mean you know from around you know within the area and no, it wasn't that much compliments because people were too busy working hard trying to put food on the table to say "Oh!" you know give you all that hug and love and compliments—no. That wasn't present then.

**00:40:43**

**SW:** And I'm wondering, because this—this program this year we're doing is about women and food, when you started the business was there anything—any challenges or upsides to being a woman in this particular industry that you found?

**00:41:00**

**CJ:** Yes; I found that when I—because my husband was working and he wasn't really like with me when I first started like I started the catering and all that. I was not able to get any money. I

had a Jaguar and I sold that Jag for \$8,000 and that gave me some funds. And finally later my husband was able to get money—get some money and then he—he gave me some money to put in the restaurant but oh, I don't think—I mean I haven't had support of you know anyone says you know—you know here's help here and you know you can get this help, no. It was tough for a woman—then. I—I had a rough time. Maybe I didn't go through the right channel but it wasn't—you know it was—it was tough.

**00:41:52**

**SW:** How did you make it work at the time?

**00:41:55**

**CJ:** Well you know to make it work I borrowed from Peter and borrowed from Paul, family members or whatever and that's how I got it to work.

**00:42:03**

**SW:** And Frank was a fire—he worked for the fire—he started a fire station is that what he—?

**00:42:09**

**CJ:** Yeah; he was a fireman with the Town of Mount Pleasant and in the area which is a rural area when we moved there, there was no fire—there was no fire—we didn't have no fire protection so we was going to build a house there. So he said, “Well I—you know I can't build a house and I don't have fire protection.” So he and my brother and the minister at the time, we all got together and formed a committee with some of the people and they went to Washington and



they were able to get some funds to start and we would have chicken dinners, barbecue and with the money we raised to match it they got some money and we started the fire department and he was the volunteer chief for it until it was—until the Town of Mount Pleasant took over and then they hired a chief. Well the Town—the County; the County took over and they hired a chief.

**00:43:05**

**SW:** And when he retired is that when he started helping with the business or—?

**00:43:10**

**CJ:** Well yeah; after he retired then he—he—he didn't start right away but when I—I was awarded a contract with the Fortune 500 and that's when he went with me and helped me out.

**00:43:25**

**SW:** Can you talk about how that happened with the Fortune 500?

**00:43:29**

**CJ:** Well were—had listed in the book as catering—you know catering Southern food and I think they were looking for Southern—a Southern cook and I think that's how I got it.

**00:43:42**

**SW:** Uh-hm; is there anything—I know I've taken a lot of—almost forty-five minutes of your time here—is there anything that I didn't ask you that you think is important for people to know about this restaurant?

**00:43:54**

**KA:** I don't know. I think you covered everything. You know we have been in the business for about eighteen—nineteen years. We started off with catering the restaurant—

**00:44:10**

**CJ:** Twenty years.

**00:44:11**

**KA:** Twenty years I would say because we—yeah; so we expanded. We took a small—a part of this building and expanded, rejuvenated. We're doing a lot of catering, weddings, and stuff. We're well known a little bit more, so—done in magazines and newspaper articles and a publisher, so I think we covered it all. And hopefully you know we are a part of Mount Pleasant which is a big—we're a big—you know people come all the way from downtown to see us within their—their Gullah tours; we're the ending to the Gullah tours. So I think you covered it all.

**00:44:58**

**CJ:** I think so too; I think so too.

**00:45:01**

**SW:** I just wanted to ask one more thing. I always say that. I'm wondering; there is—there is some you know—there is—in the book it talks a lot about the—the language of—of the Gullah

and I'm wondering you grew up with that—could you kind of talk a little bit about the specific vernacular of Gullah?

**00:45:19**

**CJ:** Well it's just a—well I grew up with it but I think by—when you move away and the—and intertwine with different people with different nationality your dialect kind of changes but if you listen closely you can tell. You can hear the Gullah tone in—in the—in my language, uh-hm.

**00:45:46**

**SW:** Is there anything that you could give as an example just for the recording?

**00:45:50**

**CJ:** Well I would say my daughter probably can do a better job because she is [*Laughs*]*—*you know I think she—she could have—she could have—she had acting. You know she—she acted very good. I think she could do a better job. She can give you a rendition of it.

**00:46:06**

**SW:** Would you like—?

**00:46:07**

**KA:** Well what happens is you—you learned—your taught to not speak like that because no one understands you, so if you went to ask somebody or to have a conversation and you started speaking like that it would seem like broken language. And they respond. And I notice that a lot

of customers will come and say, “Do you speak Gullah?” And I say, [***Gullah Dialect***]. And they’ll be like, “What did you just say?” And that’s the Gullah; I don’t speak that language. That’s what you’re trying to say. I don’t speak [***Gullah Dialect***]. So you’re just taking a lot of words and some people talk fast and some people talk slow. But it’s—it’s there, but we might not hear it.

I don’t speak that thingyah

**00:46:51**

Now I hear it downtown most likely people who have an accent, they can have a Southern accent like that or they Gullah accent which is kind of deep kind of—it sounds rude, like what you looking at me for? What you do? Get away—real quick, just general and to the point, so if we spoke that way I think people would be offended. That’s just about it.

**00:47:20**

**SW:** Okay; I do have one more question in promise. After you published the book how did—did anything change after you published the book?

**00:47:33**

**CJ:** Yeah; the book came out in March of 2010 as a hardback and that sold out. And then they did the second edition in a paperback, which I’m all out of it but it’s around town. It’s sold at Barnes and Noble and everything. So they just started that; if they would you know down—get it in paperback it would probably sell more. But I love the hardback and they said now maybe they might go back to it. But there’s been a lot of changes with the publisher and all that.

**00:48:04**

**SW:** And there was—there was one thing in the book you said when you went to research in libraries about Gullah recipes your mother’s recipes were different than what were in the books. Can you talk a little, just a—?

**00:48:16**

**CJ:** I did do a couple of—I did a couple of research because I wanted to mainly research Gullah rice and when I saw that recipe it was totally different from what my—the way my mother made it. And again, like I say, and especially in different areas, the Gullah people they have a different style of cooking. You know it’s all—it’s how they cooked in their household. And—and it’s different you know. It may taste you know taste good, but it’s different styles. It’s not—it’s not the same. But it’s all you know—you know it’s—but some people just have a different technique.

**00:49:00**

**SW:** Okay; is there anything else ladies? I’m sorry; I keep saying one more question and then I ask you ten more, so—. Well thank you both for doing this. I really appreciate it.

**00:49:09**

**CJ:** You’re welcome.

**00:49:09**

**KA:** Thank you.

**00:49:13**

**[End Jenkins Antonetti-Gullah Cuisine]**