

DICKIE BREAUX
Café Des Amis – Breaux Bridge, LA

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Location: Café Des Amis - Breaux Bridge, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen, Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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[Begin Dickie Breaux-Gumbo Trail Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Wednesday, August 13, 2008. I'm in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, with Mr. Breaux at Café Des Amis. Could I get you please to say your name and your birth date?

00:00:14

Dickie Breaux: Yeah. My name is Dickie Breaux and my full name is John Richard Breaux. I was—December 16, 1937—and I'm 70 years-old, and I've been living here in Breaux Bridge since '91. The café opened in '91.

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SR: And can you say your relationship to the café? Are you the owner?

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DB: I'm the sole owner and I'm not that active in the restaurant. By the grace of God I have really interesting and dedicated people who really enjoy working here.

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SR: Can you, I guess just for the record, to start out—describe the restaurant?

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DB: Well, the history of the restaurant: I was married back in '91 and we bought this building solely to live in. We had no—there was no concept about doing a restaurant. And I was in the restoration business. I was working for HRI [Properties] out of New Orleans, and the company did most of the Warehouse District, and so my primary interest was restoration. And my ex was working in Baton Rouge, and we moved in upstairs, and what started out as a coffee house evolved into this. And so here we are. *[Laughs]*

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SR: And do you still live upstairs?

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DB: Uh-huh, yeah, and I like my place now.

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SR: Can you tell me about your history, where you're from?

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DB: I was born here in Breaux Bridge, and at the age of 14 my parents moved to Jeanerette which is south of here, but it could have been a million miles away. *[Laughs]* The customs and all are so completely different down there than they are up here. I didn't never see myself coming to Breaux Bridge; my ex is the one that picked this building. And she was working in Baton Rouge and I was working in New Orleans and we wanted to stay in this area. But my history, after finishing high school I--I did some college at the university here in Lafayette, and I

was elected to two terms in the Louisiana Legislature representing Iberia and St. Mary Parish. And I was in the development business, and also you know I was very—always extremely interested in restoration. And I worked with HRI, I think it was about 10 years, and we did a number of—my primary function was sort of trying to revitalize the community. We did the East High School in Hammond, which we converted to live/work space for artists. We did a number of projects with Artspace [Projects] Inc. out of Minnesota where they—they're a non-profit group but they've done worlds of development with the philosophy if you bring in artists into live and you know, then everything else happens good—and that's basically what happened here. The same thing is going on in Arnaudville. So that's been sort of my interest, is in revitalization, and I've met some really interesting people. Dr. Richard Florida spent a week down here; he's the one who wrote the book on *Rise of the Creative Class*. And he was doing some studying on how that--how that worked. But he—for example, these high school... Of course Hammond was such an easy venue there because Mrs. Jimmy Morrison—I think she's still alive; her husband was a Congressman. She has done so much work with the arts and that. But anyhow, so that's been our interest.

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The café has kind of been a—a—Ray Oldenburg describes [in his book] *The Great Good Place*. It--it really has that feel to it, and in fact this book—the café I think is mentioned in his second edition of *The Great Good Place*; yeah. So it's been quite interesting. It's extremely difficult to make money in the restaurant business and we're finally, it looks like, turning the corner and doing some good. **[Laughs]** Hope Devillier, the--the lady you spoke to—you know Hope is the general manager and we're very fortunate. She--she comes here from the Chili's chain. They're supposed to be the real best in running businesses and they have great employee

benefits and they really are a good company. Outback Steakhouse came from Chili's—three of those Managers. So she's here and she's happy, I hope **[Laughs]**, for the time being and so everything is going well.

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SR: So you're trying to institute some of those similar policies into like what is really an owner-operator family run artsy business?

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DB: Yeah. I don't know whether it's I'm just plum lazy, or—. I like to think that you know sitting back and letting them—they have to evolve into what they are, and hopefully it fits into what this is about. You know we have difficult times but it's like they all—those in the right places know that, *Wait a minute; let's back off here. Let's stop and see what's going on.* And then you've got to make these choices, like you know like if a wait person upfront goes back there and starts eating out the--the chef, you know, although you want everything to work out very well but there are 10,000 waitresses out there; I don't know another chef. **[Laughs]** But by the same token, which is what we stress constantly, is that look, if you're not happy to come to work here no one else is going to be happy. So work—let us know what the problems are. But it's really--it's probably the most interesting business that you could ever get into, although you'd have to be a fool to get into it. **[Laughs]**

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SR: I was thinking it was pretty brave of you to get into it.

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DB: Well it--it was purely by accident. I had nothing to do with it to be--to be honest with you. My ex is the one that kept evolving this thing and evolving this thing and we really never made money off of it while she was here because—. Well we wound up developing five other properties—a bed and breakfast and other historic buildings—and wound up with another business in Donaldsonville. And so that was only a cash drain. And I had a job and was doing pretty well, but all of that was just going into here. So once--once everything paired down and she went her way and this was just a restaurant, and the advent of Hope, it--it's coming around, you know. It has profit potential; it has a lot of profit potential. And—but who knows?

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SR: Well can you describe for the record the kind of food that's served here? How would you describe it?

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DB: Well that--that was one of the things I did know something about, maybe quite the expert at it. My family has been dealing with food almost all of their lives. My family is from Breaux Bridge, so coming back here I knew one thing: That whatever we did we would have to do it in such a way that—well, I mean you can walk 20 or 100—three, four, five miles—everyone knows how to cook here. And then on—and it ain't just cooking. I mean this is, you know, drop-dead smashing the-best thing-you-ever-ate cooking. So we took a bold step in doing what they were doing at home, and not nearly as good as them by the way because when mom is cooking for the

family she's trying to show love. I mean hmm; I mean get out of here. You're not going to compete with that. So what we did is we did Buffalo china, we did silverware, we did napkins, and served the same food that you could get for \$4.95 at the grocery store and--and we did some other additions. We did—the dishes that I had become accustomed to from being entertained in the Legislature. You can probably imagine. You know we ate all over New Orleans. I was in business in New Orleans for a while. You know we've been recognized by *The Times-Picayune* [New Orleans newspaper] on three different occasions of having the best BBQ shrimp, which is out of the question because it's a Manale's [Pascal's Manale Restaurant] dish; it's--it's Yugoslav. It comes from the mouth of the river and it—but we have a great BBQ shrimp. We have an excellent turtle soup, which has been ranked—which is not Cajun food. So we've introduced some of the other foods from around Louisiana. And my--my son [Brett Breaux] was the one that really started the restaurant. He's now the executive chef at the Windsor Court [hotel in New Orleans]. So he knows his business, and he's a great chef.

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His--his mother is Italian and so he has a strong, strong understanding of seasonings, flavorings, taste you know. And--and he and his mom are just alike in that they can taste the dish and go home and recreate it, you know. So it—so that's the background of the restaurant. And Brett, he's a very—Brett doesn't have the ego of the normal chef.

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SR: Let me just ask you: Who are you speaking of when you say Brett?

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DB: My son at Windsor Court. He doesn't have the ego of most chefs. In fact he's very humble in some cases, but not like his brother. [*Laughs*] But he—and he's had an extremely tough life, and you know I'm very admiring of what he's done for himself. So we started with his basic knowledge. [*Cell Phone Rings*]

00:12:10

SR: I can pause this [for a phone call]. Okay, so we were talking about your son, Brett, and it sounds like he was part of the beginnings of this restaurant?

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DB: Yeah, he definitely was. And Brett--Brett has moved around a lot. He was in—he started off in Atlanta on his own; actually went to different schools. He ran a social club; then he went to work for Ritz-Carlton. He came to New Orleans with the Hilton, went back to Jacksonville with Ritz-Carlton, transferring into New Orleans. And he and the manager, who is from Lafayette, put Ritz-Carlton on the map banquet-wise, literally, and after the storm it—Ritz-Carlton just kept dragging their feet so Windsor Court picked him up.

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SR: Is his last name Breaux?

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DB: Uh-hm yeah, Brett Breaux. And he's been through—as I'm sure you know, Windsor Court is part of the Orient Express and so they've—he's already done a tour in Mexico, two places in

Mexico; Rome; and Russia. So he gets to see the world. And it--it's been quite interesting because Brett probably is the only chef that has a true Cajun background, Acadian background. And in his—other than prairie [an unofficial branch of Acadian cooking]; prairie would be Paul Prudhomme. Brett's influence is from here; Prudhomme's influence of course is Germany. Over here it's black, and--and that's why in New Orleans when you start talking about Creole, which is you know, I'm sure you're aware—what's the definition of Creole? It just all depends on who's giving it. **[Laughs]** And but what he learned from here is the way--the way I tell the difference is when Prudhomme is cooking he's cooking from smoked items. Growing up here, there's no such thing as smoked meat in this area. It's either salted or it's put into cauldrons where they cover it with hog lard and seal it, and--and that's why the cooking here I think is so exceptionally good, is because everything has salt influence—everything.

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As Emeril came to understand—you know a Portuguese from New Jersey coming to New Orleans and cooking Cajun **[Laughs]**, he picked up early on and used to always say *pork rules, pork rules, pork rules*, and—. He got that from Marcelle Bienvenu in St. Martinville, who taught him how to cook Cajun.

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SR: Pork what?

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DB: Rules.

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SR: Rules. Okay, yeah.

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DB: In France it's butter; down here it's pork and it's in everything. You may not see it but it's in—and I think what sets this area apart, or us apart, is everything is well-seasoned. You can go down to the grocery store on the corner, which I do a lot, and you eat the beans and the rice and gravy, and I mean everything has such a fantastic flavor. And all of them separate and distinct flavors; they're not just, you know, one flavor. So I--I'd say Brett is probably the only true Central South Louisianan chef on the market today. Certainly what Paul Prudhomme does is outstanding, in [every] way shape or form, but that's an influence which is way to the north of us—Eunice, Ville Platte and that area.

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SR: I've never had anybody explain to me that there isn't a smoked tradition in this area. Is that—what do you attribute that to, the lack of German influence or—?

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DB: Oh yeah; yeah, if you go to the--what we call the prairie Cajuns, you've got Mouton Cove which is just nothing but Germans. There was a strong influence here before the Cajuns arrived, and over here what you had was—the main dish in this area was, primarily because of poverty [*interruption*] was--was coush-coush. And the reason for that is they grew corn in this area. It was a labile crop, rather than sugarcane, so you could take it and you could plow that under

and—. But also the corn was used to feed the mules that pulled the plows. So they learned to make coush-coush from that.

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SR: Can you describe for me what coush-coush is?

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DB: Uh-hm. It's--it's ground up corn, yellow corn—you know, the one that you feed the animals. And then they take and they put it on the mustard grinder at--at the mills. And then it's fried; it's fried, and back then it was fried in hog lard—and with salt and cornmeal, and it's served with milk. It's--it's probably a takeoff on couscous which is made from wheat of course. But a couple of writers who have been here, international writers, [say] there's only two places in the world where you can get coush-coush today. It's here and Senegal, Africa, so—.

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SR: By *here* do you mean at the restaurant?

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DB: Yeah, we serve it, uh-hm.

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SR: And what's a mustard grinder? I haven't heard of that.

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DB: Well it's the—it's the proverbial grain mill, you know, where the mustard seed is just the seed but when you grind it up it becomes mustard, which they add vinegar to it. It's a huge—that's what they used to do with the windmills, remember—you were running one stone on top of the other. Well you take it to the mill and they do that. And any one of the mills here would do it. But you know cornmeal is just readily available now, but at the time the blacks—it was a survival meal. And they were just absolutely starving to death over here, and the blacks took the Cajuns under their wings. And that's where, in my opinion, all the excellent food comes from, their background. Not from Africa but from the fact that this area was once the richest area of the entire world when cotton was king. And obviously the head of the house didn't do any cooking, so whenever they came in with recipes and--and seasoning and whatever, they gave it to the black grandma who was cooking in the kitchen. Well she was smart enough to show love to her people; she was smart enough and able to go back and take the pieces that they didn't like. Maybe the heads of the fish, the bones, or the leftovers, and she made some of the most fantastic meals. So that got passed on.

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And because the food in Nova Scotia today is—as good as it was back then: not worth a damn. **[Laughs]** You know it's English cooking and they just have—they've got a problem with the seasoning where over here everything is about seasoning. When--when you do it and what point you do it, and let's face it—that's basically all they had to do was be creative in cooking.

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SR: I'm curious, you know you mentioned corn. Was there more corn than rice tradition here?

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DB: That's a good question. Of course rice grew wild here. You know in the marshes and everything else you could get rice, but you know that's a real good question. I never thought about that. At what point did—well corn was just—you know rice would have had to have been something they went and bought at the store. Corn was available—they called it, in French it was a grenier, and they could have all they wanted. They weren't stealing from the household; they were taking it away from the mules and whatever. And so it—.

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SR: I have so many questions. Let me just start by asking, what is your ancestry?

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DB: On my mother's side it's French, but you know the--the working class, Bordeaux area of France. On my father's side it's pure Cajun and it—I'm Breaux and Guidry, which is two prominent names here. And my mother is Thebent and Thibodeaux—T-h-e-b-e-n-t. And they were a very poor—well by today's standards it would have been—they were a pretty influential family in the sense that they were blacksmiths, gunsmiths, which is very rare to have that concentration of France families up amongst Cajuns because there was just nothing in common.

[Laughs] I mean that's why Cajuns wound up down here and didn't--didn't hang around New Orleans, is that the French would have nothing to do with the Cajuns. It was—you know we came here; we were very illiterate, didn't fit in anywhere, and you know if you look at the history of this—certainly this parish, St. Martin Parish—you have what they call Open Pine

Alley. This--this is how much decadence and wealth there was. When his daughter was born he planted oak tree, pine tree, oak tree, pine tree for about a mile from the main road to the plantation, and when his daughter got married, he imported spiders from Africa and weaved a web over—and sprinkled it with gold and silver.

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SR: Who did that?

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DB: It was the Duchamps family. That was the 1700s and these were the French, you understand? Now can you imagine inviting a Cajun who doesn't have any shoes to the wedding? I don't think so, you know. **[Laughs]**

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SR: But by the time your parents' generation came around they had merged cultures?

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DB: No, oh no; no, it's still that way today. You go to St. Martinville and those **[Laughs]**--those French people there think they're really something. Well you know if you look at the community, you know they referred to it as Little Paris for years. It was the--and it was the first migration into this area and it was done with the French and they had a difficult time. You know they had the—they went up against the Atakapa Indians who were cannibals, and so you know the--the strain of the economics and of trading and what have you—. And you know there's a

long history of trading between the Indians and the French, long before most anyone came down here. The Indian tribes here still tell stories about the French who paddled down from Canada for trading. But it didn't take long for the Cajuns to--to carve out their niche, which was in the lowlands and in the area that nobody else wanted. Cajuns primarily found themselves in the--in the Atchafalaya Basin fishing, which is what they were doing in Nova Scotia, and merging with the blacks.

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And it's difficult to understand some of this; some people still have prejudice towards the blacks, where in my opinion you know it would be like the Pilgrims shooting the Indians after they taught them to—after they taught them to cook the turkey. **[Laughs]** I don't know; but this—I think that's one of the reasons for the success of the place, is because we do the Zydeco music on Saturdays, and as--as one friend told me standing here one day and looking across at the graveyard, he said, *You know some of my ancestors are rolling over in their grave.* I said, *I'm sure they are.* **[Laughs]** But the tremendous African American influence into what I—I still think Cajun is the best food in the world. Of course I've had some food critic from London... Who she is, I forget her name. She certainly is the grande dame; she says, *I'll give you that it's an extremely interesting food but nothing is better than Thai cooking,* and I agree with her. It--I don't know how they were able to consistently blend all the seasonings and flavorings that they do and you know the—I think the real creativity of cooking, which Brett has, is knowing that this is going to go well with this and taking the chance of blending those two together. And--and so to answer your question, which I think was what is the influence over here? How did it come about? Is that—is that where we were before I lost my train of thought?

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SR: We were there.

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DB: Okay.

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SR: And other places.

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DB: Okay, well there's—to me there's so much about this--this area that you can go in a million different directions, as far as how did it arrive to where we are now. And I think the principal thing, it goes back to Grandma coming home with what—nothing but the carcasses into the slave quarters. She had the carcasses; she had the bones; she had certain things that were leftover from the--from the house. And with that she had to make something, and my definition of great Cajun cooking is: By the time you finish with it, throw the meat away because everything is in the gravy. And that's the basic premise of Cajun cooking.

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I can remember my grandmother saying, *Fried chicken? You must be crazy. I can cook chicken stew for 20 people.* You know one fried chicken might feed four people. **[Laughs]** So it--my sense of it is all of the flavoring, which was discovered by the blacks, comes from the bone. You know in my opinion everybody wants to eat white meat; I mean that's BF Goodrich. There's no flavor in white meat chicken. Now you take the thigh of the chicken where all the—

and it's just--it has all the flavor, the flavor that's going into making what gives you your sauce. So the whole issue of Cajun cooking in this area was how to go about deriving flavor with very little meat because that was very expensive.

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I know one of the interesting things is, I think it was 1955, *Look Magazine* picked the 10 top chefs in the world and the one that won was a Broussard, black, from Commander's Palace, and he--his dish was fish court bouillon. And--and I'm going, *I can't believe this*; man, I just—it just blew my mind. Fish court bouillon: You--you take the heads of the fish and you boil them forever and you add your onions, your bell peppers, and then if you happen to have some meat you put it in the last 10 minutes. And like to me, I said, *How in the hell can that be the top dish in the world when it's nothing but trash?* And--and that I think is the secret to the—how do you take trash and turn it into something as delectable as that? So, and that's basically true; that's how gumbo came about. Do you know what the--do you know what the history of gumbo is?

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SR: I would love it if you'd tell me. [*Laughs*]

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DB: [*Laughs*] It's the generic name for okra; you cannot ship across State lines anything called gumbo unless it has okra in it, okay. And it was brought here by the Africans. It's--it's native to Africa but it was brought here as a thickening agent. Well undoubted, we Cajuns didn't get a hold of that any time too soon, so we used roux, which is--which I'm sure was used in the plantation days. But roux is--roux is identical to miso.

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SR: Miso?

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DB: Yeah, miso is soy mash and oil. Roux is flour and oil. And it was used for the same identical reasons—extensions of flavor. And I don't know how that—but that would probably corroborate that, you know, big bad Duchamps went to China; he came back and then he told the black grandma, *This is what they're doing over there*, and she—. And I think that is where the creativity came in, which is Cajun ingenuity too—is they understand what it is and they started putting pieces together in their head and then you wind up with a dish.

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The real secret of great, great gumbo, in my opinion, is pick the--pick the particular meat that you want and find the toughest meat you can find, you know. Guinea is great; that's one of the top gumbos cooked by [Cajuns]. We don't do it here because it's quite extensive. Or hen. And the reason for that, whether they knew it or not, is you continue cooking until you get all that marrow out of the bone, and--and once you've done that, that's where your flavor is. Great chicken cacciatore is the same thing; you bake it in the oven and you bake it in the oven. I think the--I know when I was working on the turtle soup I had gotten into I guess you'd call it a pissing contest with *The Morning Advocate* [newspaper]. And they said everything in here was good except my turtle soup. Well so I went on a mission with my son and we just couldn't quite get what I was looking for. I was trying to copy what I remembered from the Pontchartrain Hotel. They had the best turtle soup in the world. And so what we came up with is, finally I

stumbled on one of Ella Brennan’s cookbooks from Commander’s Palace and she graciously shows you everything that goes on, but it said *and you add your broth*. Well it didn’t say what the broth was, so finally I went back to [our] broth—and this is where the real--which sort of reinforces my thoughts about the influence [of Cajun cooking]. To make beef broth she’d take it and bake it in bags, in mesh bags. Bake it and bake it and then crush the bone, all of that bone, and then she’d put that in the bag into the turtle soup.

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SR: Who would do that?

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DB: Commander’s Palace. Now, I’m sure they do like we do. Once you got it well then you find a simpler way to do it. **[Laughs]** And then you can buy beef broth or whatever. But it—to me that’s just the verification of, you know, when you really want true deep, deep flavor that’s where it’s coming from [the bones]. And I bought some on occasion and undoubtedly not a lot of people are doing it because it’s very difficult to get the bone—very, very difficult. You know it’s not something that’s readily available like the meat is; so—. Our turtle soup, I like it you know, and like I told you, I think the *The Times Picayune* and *The Advocate* finally came through and said we had great turtle soup.

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SR: Do you--do you use turtle in it?

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DB: Oh yeah. Well it's the freshwater turtle—not—not sea turtle. In fact I was going to the grocery store way out in the country here and I was buying the turtle meat. And the lady says—I'm fixing to write her a check from the café and she sits the turtle—and I think she had about 40 pounds—on the counter. And she looks up at me and she says, *Can you imagine? They got people that take this meat and make soup out of it.* I wouldn't write her a check; I paid her cash.

[Laughs]

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SR: Well what was she doing?

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DB: Oh turtle sauce piquante. Turtle meat is the—it has seven distinctive meats in it. You know white, red, brown, and then there's this upside; downside. It's phenomenal, oh yeah.

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SR: And so you buy the turtle from around here usually?

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DB: We used to be able to. There's very little of it being harvested here. It's now coming primarily from around Ferriday up near the Mississippi. And it--it's available; I mean we don't have any trouble getting it. But we have almost as much beef influence from the beef bone broth thing as we do the turtle meat. Now people don't—we don't do that much meat in the soup but

we haven't gotten that many complaints. It's that and the—which I never could figure out what that distinctive taste was: it's cloves. And what she would do is they'd stick the cloves in an onion—whole cloves in an onion—and while you--you're cooking down your bone or what have you, you've got that clove flavor in there. And then you just take the onion out so you don't ever see clove or--it's just taking that flavor out of the clove. I think that there is so much to cooking and I'm—not to say that I compare with it by a long shot, but I think Mrs. Brennan's philosophy is *give the recipes away*. Which is so true because I can give you a recipe and you go home and it won't--it won't come out, you know. So it's--it's what is your personal influence in that particular dish, and then the influence of the chef prevails. But I think one of the reasons why cooking here is different probably from other areas—and I think still the best—is you--you could go to another area of the country and you could attempt to influence your employees to cook, but see these guys are going home and they're eating what we're cooking here everyday, you know, and so that it automatically becomes either instinctive—from instincts—or what you do everyday. That's why when you--when I go to a place like Hebert's [supermarket], what I'm looking for is how many blacks do you got working in the kitchen and I can tell you whether the food is going to be good or not.

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SR: Where is Hebert's?

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DB: Right around the corner. In fact I had what's his name again? Hudson Valley foie gras. Michael—have you heard of him? Michael—? Yes, he's the only one that makes foie gras. He

came down here when John Folse had his grand opening in Donaldsonville, so I put him up over here. And I went to the grocery store in Lafayette and bought him two orders of chicken stew. And I served it to him—you know, Buffalo china and the whole nine yards. At the time it was like \$3.50. Ginor, Michael Ginor, and he writes for a number of the big magazines too. So he and his girlfriend are just eating it up. I said, *What would you pay for this in New York?* He said, *Whatever they asked.* I said, *Well it's \$3.50.* **[Laughs]**

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SR: That says something. Let me ask you a little bit more about gumbo. So earlier you were talking about okra being an important component, but the French couldn't easily get their hands on that—.

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DB: The Cajuns.

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SR: Or the Cajuns. Do you—sorry—do you suspect that people were making roux gumbos before okra even arrived and just not calling it gumbo?

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DB: Hmm, good question.

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SR: I thought maybe that's what you were saying.

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DB: I don't know. I really don't know the answer to that. I certainly know this—giving a guess—they would have started back with, you know, *Okay I'm bringing over chicken bones and we're going to put that in the pot and we're going to cook that down. Now how do you thicken it?* And you know it's--it's the thought that somewhere down the line, that somebody came back and said that miso is nothing but a thickening agent and passed that on, and then you know flour was available, so—. And--and for the most part everything here was done with hog lard. I mean there was no vegetable oil; there was no canola oil, no peanut oil. So as you know what roux is—it's just constantly cooking and cooking it and keeping it from burning, 'cause what you're doing is burning it, but you're stirring it so it doesn't [completely burn]. And I don't know. Maybe--maybe that was the advent, but okra certainly is a prominent dish in this area, you know. But now when it comes to seafood gumbo, shrimp and okra gumbo is just what is what everyone uses. That's what everyone here likes when it comes to seafood gumbo.

00:42:50

Now the—I don't know. I just don't know. **[Laughs]**

00:42:57

SR: Can you tell me what kind of gumbo you serve here at the restaurant?

00:43:00

DB: Both. We do duck and andouille, which is done with a roux base, and then we do a shrimp and okra, which also has basically a roux base. But okra is--okra is not an easy dish to deal with. I mean that slime, it just—you really have to know how to do it in order to make it work. I've got to run to the restroom.

00:43:28

SR: So can you tell me what kind of gumbo you grew up eating at home, and if that influenced the kind of gumbo that you serve here?

00:43:39

DB: It would have been chicken and sausage but fresh sausage and not smoked. Now here we use smoked. Now during the winter months I insist that they serve the chicken and sausage, so they use the hen and the fresh pork sausage and you know make the gumbo from that, and it's served as a special. Gumbo traditionally was never cooked during the summer months; it was just a winter dish. And how it got the name gumbo, to me is very interesting because it certainly constitutes the influence of okra and--and there would have been no other place to get the name from but *gombo* [an African name for okra].

00:44:43

But yeah, I would say that the influence or the flavor that I was looking for that I remembered as a child would have been the marrow from the bone—what you--what you're getting from there. And just the same thing is true with our turtle soup. We cook the turtle soup—oh Lord, we cook the meat for maybe two and a half hours until it naturally falls off the bone, and--and that's how we do with the—we had to go with that. You cook the chicken until it

literally falls off the bone for fear that somebody will swallow the piece of bone or whatever. But I'm fascinated with when I go into a restaurant and there's nothing but chunks of white meat in-- in the gumbo. It's tough to derive a flavor from that. *[Laughs]*

00:45:41

SR: So you use a roux for both. You use the same color roux for both gumbos?

00:45:47

DB: Basically yes; yeah, yes. We--the chefs have improved substantially about—oh I don't know if improved—. They do a lot of what's called blonde roux, butter and flour that, you know it's cooked down but it's still yellowish; and then they'll add that as a thickening agent, but they'll start off with the dark roux. Whether it's in your fricassee or your chicken stew or whatever else that you're making. And so there is a combination of, you know, French and Cajun because we use a lot of blonde roux.

00:46:38

SR: Oh so they'll add a blonde roux at the end of like the gumbo let's say?

00:46:42

DB: While they're cooking.

00:46:44

SR: Oh really?

00:46:44

DB: Yeah, if it's--you know they want to thicken it. But you see that was the premise of okra. When it wasn't thick enough you just threw some more okra in. And, but okra—*Chili Pepper Magazine* out of [Texas] has picked our shrimp and okra gumbo as tops in the country. We've been on the cover of *Chili Pepper Magazine* three times with the gumbo. It's an interesting story.

00:47:16

The State was filming a commercial in here years ago and there's a young African American reporter for the--for the station, TV station, and they hired her and all of her family and they were sitting at the table and I guess the message was, you know we do accept blacks and whites—you know, da-da-da. And Debra—Debra--what the hell is her name? She's written up in—. [Interruption] And she asked me if—she said, *Do you mind if I give you a tip?* No, not at all. She says, *You have a sheen on your shrimp and okra gumbo. Do you know how to get rid of it?* No, I said, I wish I did. She said, *Well when you're in the pot—the big pot— all you need is either a teaspoon of Lea & Perrins or vinegar because Lea & Perrins is all vinegar.* And sure enough you just put one teaspoon in and, oh, the sheen goes away. [Laughs]

00:48:36

SR: Why wouldn't you want the sheen?

00:48:37

DB: Oh it looks like--looks like an oil slick. [Laughs] It's not very appetizing.

00:48:46

SR: I'll have to keep that in mind.

00:48:47

DB: Yeah; oh it works every time. In fact you know I kept saying well—and that's why we got picked for top gumbo. Everybody else's gumbo, whenever they photographed it you'd say, *Well when are they going to clean up the oil spill*, you know? So one day I said, *I'm going to do her a favor*. I stopped by and I bought a dozen roses and I drove to the TV station and I asked to see her. So she comes out and she's about that high [**Gestures**]; she comes out and she says, *How are you doing?* I said, *Hey, how are you doing?* I said, *You know I've been wanting to do this for a long time*. So I give her the box of roses. She opens it up and she almost passes out. I said, *What's the matter?* She said, *Have you heard of [Saint] Therese the Little Flower?* I said, *Yeah*. She says, *You pray to her and you know your prayers are answered if on the ninth day somebody will give you roses*. And she said, *Today is the ninth day*. And I said, *I can assure you this was not God's job*. [**Laughs**] *This is purely by accident. I should have done it months ago*. But she's a trip.

00:49:58

But anyhow that--I think that just typified that the blacks are just—I mean not only are they great cooks. I mean they're technicians of the food. They're so—well, and that's a perfect example. I mean they're so unselfish about what they know and--and how they use it. Because that's how they were brought up. They came from the plantation house and then it filtered down into the quarters and in the quarters, you know—so things were tough on them but they ate good— [**Laughs**] better than the plantation people.

00:50:43

SR: What about your chef now? Who is your chef now?

00:50:46

DB: Chris Robert. He's sticking his head out of the kitchen there. He's from Baton Rouge; it's him and his brother.

00:50:52

SR: What's his last name?

00:50:55

DB: Robert.

00:50:57

SR: Robert?

00:50:58

DB: Uh-hm. Chris--Chris has been in and out of here like most chefs. We have a heart attack; they go ballistic, you know—in and out of here for about five years, but he's the—there's no question, but I don't know how I didn't see it before but he's just the best. I mean he--he has this ability not only to create, which is really tough back there, but to keep doing the same dish over and over and over and over. And you know one of the toughest things you have to do back there

is taste the food. I mean you know if you taste the same thing every day it's got to turn into something disgusting. So he uses the employees and he'll ask them to taste and he's very open. I don't know. One day maybe I'll learn it but it's very difficult dealing with them because you can't step on their--on their ego, you know. It just--it's tough. I guess my battleground is my last wife who is an artist and I should have learned from that. *[Laughs]*

00:52:20

SR: You're drawn to that world.

00:52:23

DB: Yeah, very much so. Yeah.

00:52:27

SR: Well I'd like to ask you some questions about boudin, but I feel like I should maybe pause for a minute and take some photos and taste that. They've just brought some—one each of the gumbos and a cup of turtle soup, I'm guessing. And--and it's interesting to me you serve potato salad. Before I pause, tell me, how do you deal with the potato salad? Do you put it in the gumbo or just eat it on the side?

00:52:50

DB: Oh no, I eat mine on the side but just about everybody else puts it in there--puts it in the gumbo.

00:52:58

SR: All right, so we were just talking off the recording about the challenges of making your own roux in an operation of this size. Can you talk about that, and also what you told me about the steam kettle?

00:53:13

DB: Yeah. What--as I told you, they use a lot of blonde roux, which is very easy to do because you're just mixing--until you get a consistency that you're looking for. To get a darker roux, I mean you really have to cook for an extended period of time and watching it very closely, keeping it from burning. I don't know if you've ever had roux pop up on you when you're making it--cooking it. It will burn you to the bone instantly; it's like a welding torch. But with the advent of the steam kettle, which you can set, people are able to make acceptable roux. And basically you're looking for color. And--and a perfect example of this is when my son decided one of the first dishes he was going to serve here was the seafood corn bisque in a white sauce. And I told him, *Man you—Brett, you're crazy man; there ain't nobody going to eat that over here. They all want brown.* Well guess what's our number one seller? [**Laughs**] And--and it goes back to the theory of they don't do seafood corn bisque at home. They do these [*gestures at the bowls of gumbo*] at home. And so it would be something that's interesting to people in this area.

00:54:45

The other thing which we didn't do and they're starting to do, which I'm kind of glad they have, we never did a fried seafood platter. And everywhere you go in the world, when you start talking about Cajun food, they're talking about the fried seafood platter, you know, and that's very easy to understand. The reason why it became extremely popular here is grandma and

mama didn't have a deep fat fryer. So when they go to the restaurant they could get properly fried deep-fried food. And you know if you think about it the influence of fried food would have been—you could even have had a piece of fried fish that grandma would fix for you; you could fry some crawfish or you could fry some shrimp, but you certainly couldn't have all three of them together. Well that's what happened with the advent of fried seafood: seafood platter became a very popular dish here with the locals.

00:55:52

But what's you know—I think what people are blown away with is these dishes that you're eating right now in that there's so much flavor; there's so much I guess you'd say history in what's in there and—. Had you ever eaten at Uglesich's?

00:56:18

SR: I miss that place. It's not there.

00:56:20

DB: Oh man, this guy was just unbelievable. He—and to me he was the epitome of what—if you want to roll up into one place and one human being what Cajun cooking, the theory of Cajun cooking, was—is, and how it evolved, you would point to him. And I mean like that dish he did with the shrimp and the--and the sweet potatoes, you know, I mean it was like, who would have ever thought of that? *[Laughs]*

00:56:50

SR: And he's not even Cajun.

00:56:53

DB: I know but my point is that it was his creativity to be able to know that this and this is going to taste good, you know, and then want to try it. Because chefs back there, they're like artists you know. It's that when they send something out here, as far as they're concerned they're out here naked, you know. They're--they're showing their butts; they're showing everything and they take it very [seriously] you know. So in order to not only taste the dish but to have the ability to send it out there—. I had the Zagats, Tim and Nina Zagat were here some years ago, and they've had two visits here, and I didn't know who he was the first time. He was meeting Marcelle Bienvenu here. And Marcelle was the--I told you, the person who taught Emeril how to cook Cajun cooking. And so after a while he brings out—so I would know who he was—brings out his [restaurant] guide, and on the back you know they got *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, who's the guy that writes all the operas—.

00:58:12

SR: I don't know.

00:58:13

DB: Yeah, he wrote *Cats* and his--his personal rendition of Tim and Nina—you don't need anything else when it comes to food. Well they're both attorneys and super nice people, and I asked him one day, I said—. He had just come from spending the weekend with Mrs. [Ella] Brennan and they were on their way to San Antonio, he and his wife, driving. And I said, *What's your favorite place to eat in New Orleans?* He said, When the plane lands, if they'll allow me to

get a cab on the runway or wherever I get a cab, it depends on the time of the day; if it's anywhere near 11:15 I'm going to Uglesich's. **[Laughs]** So I told that to my—my son had gotten to know—what was his first name?

00:59:04

SR: Anthony.

00:59:05

DB: Anthony, 'cause one of the black dudes that was working with Anthony was also working with Brett at the hotel. And I went in there one day and I told him this and he said, *Wow, man*. So I said, *I'm going to tell you what. I'm going to write you a letter*—which I did. I wrote him a letter and he had it posted on the wall before--before he closed. But you know it'--that to me is what—you can go in a place and eat his soft-shell crabs, his—all of his dishes—or you can eat a po-boy. And that to me is like, this is what Cajun cooking used to be like in this area. And just not only fantastic food, creative food, and I love the way he would do that—. I was in there one day and one woman says, *What's the size of the crabs?* And he just looks at her and goes, *What difference does it make?* **[Laughs]** She wanted to see the soft-shell crab before she ordered it.

01:00:19

SR: He's confident. I just want to comment that this chicken andouille gumbo is delicious and really full of flavor. And it looks to me like most of the meat in here is dark meat—or is that just coincidence?

01:00:36

DB: Well a lot of—that's duck.

01:00:39

SR: Oh that's why. Okay, yeah you told me that earlier. I was like, *Gosh this doesn't taste like chicken.*

01:00:45

DB: Yeah, we don't do the chicken here. They've stuck with the duck except during the winter months.

01:00:50

SR: And so this must be a duck stock, too, huh?

01:00:53

DB: Well it—again we're getting the bone; they're going to cook that duck, the bone in there, 'til it falls off.

01:01:02

SR: No wonder. And what's great, it has a nice acidity at the end, like a tanginess.

01:01:08

DB: Well that--that probably comes from the andouille.

01:01:13

SR: I see. Let me ask you—well, first of all can you just explain, to go back, what a steam kettle is?

01:01:21

DB: Yeah. Instead of having a direct flame underneath your cooking, what it does is that usually if it's—there's a radiance and it's like a hot water heater. It boils the water and then the water heats the kettle either—whether it's gas or electric. So what you have is, you don't have a flame perpetuating the heat; it's just--it's just water, so not only is it much easier to make your roux but the chances of your burning it are almost remote—and you know you set your temperature. So then all you have to do is watch and keep stirring so that you get a consistent cooking throughout, and then they've got it down pat. They have an electric paddle in there while it's—and that's really all you need.

01:02:23

SR: There's an electric paddle?

01:02:25

DB: Uh-hm. Or you can—they used to do that with pralines years and years ago, and that's how they made pralines in New Orleans. You had a cooking kettle but they—the flame then was directly under the kettle, this big bakery type operation, rotating, and so it—. Roux has evolved today as basically coloring, primarily. Because blonde roux, for thickening, has taken basically

the place of what okra could do, and you don't have to have as much. The other thing is that, you know, while you're cooking down your stock, your bone or whatever in there, as that's cooking down you're boiling the water off. So you have to constantly be adding water. And then you get to the point [where] okay, I have the flavor that I need. I'm taking the chicken out but it's still not thick enough, you know. What do you do then? And that's when they add the blonde roux. But you know you have to start with a good color. You see that oil sheen [*pointing at a bowl of gumbo*]?

01:03:44

SR: Yeah.

01:03:45

DB: That you see in there, people would think that that's grease. That's actually the marrow from the bone; that too [*gesturing*].

01:03:56

SR: That doesn't look like a bad thing to me actually.

01:03:57

DB: Well yeah. I mean I look for it. When there's a great, great rice and gravy, which is—you see that it looks like that same sheen or color you see around the edge of an oyster. You know that brown, and it—so whenever that circle comes out, man, you know you've got something special. Most people will look at it [and say], *Man I ain't eating that greasy crap.* [**Laughs**] And

what you're passing up. And you know you really have to know what you're looking for when you're looking at it. I think of Dunbar's in New Orleans. And they do a great job there, whew.

01:04:45

SR: Yeah, they do. I love their gumbo.

01:04:50

DB: Oh yeah, they're good. They know what they're doing.

01:04:51

SR: Let me ask you about boudin a little bit. What—in what form do you serve boudin here at the restaurant?

01:04:59

DB: Only one. We buy the boudin unpacked or out of the casing, and we serve it with eggs—breakfast. It's a boudin patty that they grill, and then however you want your egg cooked. We--we're experimenting with boudin as hors d'oeuvres and what have you but it just—it hasn't been a big, big thing. Now we sell a hell of a lot of it for breakfast, you know. We open for breakfast Friday and Saturday and Sunday and it's a big, big item. And it's, you know it's a great breakfast dish. I remember in my early 20s, 30s, they were eating boudin for breakfast and I'm going, *Wow. Man. Golly, boudin for breakfast.* Well I mean what is it? It's pork, which is bacon; it's rice, which is cereal. You know, you're getting everything that you normally get for breakfast in the boudin. And but that's--that's really a mystery: Who does the best boudin. And then again

it's--to me it's how much liver that they're putting in, in ratio to the actual pork meat, and again the way that it's cooked. Some boudin(s) are a little too powerful for me; I'm not a big liver person. But it certainly was nothing but what was leftover after the boucherie.

01:06:41

And that brings up another interesting point because I remember as a kid, boucherie is one of the neighbors butchered a hog, so all of the neighbors came. And that was for preservation. Well this week we're going--we're going to butcher the hog and they divided the meat up amongst the families. The next week, well I'm going to do what—they divided up the meat. And that way, you know, they would use everything up in that week—during the summer months. And--and then they started the salt meat, which was packing it in salt. But I think also what happened is, you may have had seven, eight, maybe ten families who came together and shared recipes. And--and in every case there was always some black person there who was actually instructing them on how to do the boucherie. And then their influence was added, so it—. The recipes became absolutely perfected in--in a sense here in this area—became perfected out of necessity. And it was just you know, they certainly wasn't waiting for somebody like yourself to come and interview them. It was just, *I like what you're doing, so I would like to do it*, you know, and it is so, so important. You know when you introduce an item into the pot, at what temperature do you introduce that item into the pot? At what time and at what interval, and you know on and on and on. It would drive you nuts to try to wow; man—. Whereas if you're, as one person referred to it, if you're an inspirational cook you're just--you're just doing what—. And it's like my aunt who was an absolutely fabulous, fabulous cook. She's the one that had the most influence on Brett. I asked her one day, I said, *How much powdered red pepper do you put in your étouffée?* You know what, she kind of backs up; she was a little bitty thing. *Well, you put*

enough. [Laughs] Which means, You idiot, you just keep adding it until you get it to where you want it. No such thing as measuring; I mean never. And [she] kept doing it over and over again.

01:09:28

SR: Where—well let me ask: Were you part of a boucherie growing up? Was that part of—?

01:09:33

DB: Oh yeah; oh yeah. Oh it was a way of life, absolutely. I mean it—they'd make the fresh pork sausage, the cracklings; oh I mean it was a big, big ta-do. It started off like at 4 o'clock in the morning, killing the hog; they had to bleed it, you know, and it went on all the way into the night—a big, big affair.

01:10:00

SR: Did your family or your neighbors make boudin when they would do the boucherie?

01:10:04

DB: Oh well you did everything. I mean you had blood sausage. You had the white sausage. You had hogshead cheese. You had cracklings. They even made soap. After--after the cracklings were cooked the hog lard was turned into soap. I guess you had lye. I think that's what they would do, and store that.

01:10:32

SR: Did you have a job--did you have a job during the boucherie as a child?

01:10:35

DB: Yes, to give everybody enough crap to where they'd punish you. **[Laughs]** The one thing that happened to me—good or bad, I don't know but—we were eating the hog cracklings and it was warm and we were running around and I got sick as a dog. So I didn't--I didn't eat cracklings for a long time. **[Laughs]**

01:10:58

SR: But now you do?

01:10:58

DB: Oh yeah; well to a point. I'm--I'm trying to deal with everything else that my over-abundance has caused me. **[Laughs]**

01:11:08

SR: Where do you buy your boudin?

01:11:10

DB: There's a little grocery store right on Berard Street about three blocks down on the right. It's called Charlie T's. I like his. Well but it's always up to the chef; I mean he decides what influence he wants, you know according to his tastes and—. But he is pretty well--Chris has pretty well stuck with things that we had before. But you know it's just—it's a crazy life you know. **[Interruption.]** One of the problems I had, which I didn't recognize: As I was bringing

Brett in and he would sit and talk to these guys, I thought they would see this as a, you know, *Wow. We're getting somebody that's been around the world.* [But] it was a complete insult. But you know they go back there and they just stuff all that down and you don't get anything until one day they blow up and walk out, you know. And--and that's basically what— **[Laughs]**.

01:12:35

SR: Because it was stepping on their toes a little bit?

01:12:37

DB: Yeah. But Chris, he's picked up on it and he's very interested in--in exploring you know. He's--and so he's kind of stayed—his tastes I guess sort of coincide with mine, but that's his kitchen you know, and if he's going to be creative I got to stay the hell out of his way **[Laughs]** and--and get everybody else out of his way. I think Hope is just—she's able to deal with these guys in a way that I've never seen anybody else do. I mean you know she--she knows what needs to happen and she's able to influence that without stepping on these egos. Thank God she's here you know.

01:13:33

SR: How long has she been here?

01:13:35

DB: Hope has only been here two years now but she was here six years ago and left. She and the goddess of the moon had a run-in—my ex thinks she's the goddess of the moon. Anyhow, and

the minute Hope saw the opportunity she came back and she asked me, and I said, Well *I've got a manager now*. The staff held a meeting with me and said, *You're going to hire her*. Okay. And believe me, the guy that was the mainstay—that's how stupid this business is—the guy that was the big pusher was the chef at the time. She comes here and she's here three months and he quits. But that--that's how we wound up with Chris, and believe me he is—. I think the whole thing, it's an evolving thing. It--you know, who is in here at the time, how do they feel, what kind of mood they're in. Because you know you can follow a recipe to--to the enth degree but it's what you're doing at that time.

01:14:45

In fact a perfect example: Brett was working at the Hilton in New Orleans and he'd go to the Palace Café on Sunday. He'd have the white chocolate bread pudding and Drambuie. That's what Brett drinks. And he wanted the recipe for that, and he kept at it, and finally the bartender told him, *Hey, you're trying to figure out what's in that white chocolate bread pudding?* Brett says, *Yeah*. He said, *Why didn't you tell me that when you came?* He said, *Why?* He [the bartender] reaches under the counter and gives him the recipe. [*Laughs*]

01:15:23

SR: Uh-uh? [*Laughs*]

01:15:27

DB: Because that's--that's how Mrs. Brennan is. In fact I asked Ted and Nina Zagat—you know, they live at, I think it's like their across the hall neighbor is Madonna in--in New York and

their home in the country is number one Zagat Place in the country. **[Laughs]** Well I mean when you're the top food critic in the world.

01:16:02

SR: Yeah, I guess.

01:16:04

DB: And they--they even have a Broadway play about him and it's like the maître'd is running around like his head—he says, *There isn't a table available and the Zagats are sitting in the lobby. What the hell are we going to do?* But I asked them, I said, *Who is some of the most interesting people you've ever met?* And they both said it; they said the two most gracious and truly interesting people we've ever met are Lindy Boggs and Mrs. Ellen Brennan. Yeah and--and I don't know Mrs. Brennan, but I know Lindy and it's so true. I mean these—here are people who have made gigantic strides here in America to--that rival—Jesus, I mean your husband [Hale Boggs] was the Democratic Whip of the House, the single most powerful man in Washington. And I know that because I was in the House of Representatives here while he was in Washington. I mean that--at that point the President of the United States didn't wake up fully until he understood where the Louisiana Delegation was going. And it was--Russell Long was Chairman of the Finance Committee; Allen Ellender was President of the Senate and the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee; F. Edward Hebert, a former news—*Times-Picayune* newspaper guy—was charged with the Military whatever; and then you had Joe Wagner and--and Jimmy Morrison. I mean this is the most powerful Delegation in America and Lindy, as they

would all say, she would throw parties and that was her job. And if you weren't invited to Lindy's party there was a pretty good chance you weren't going to get reelected. **[Laughs]**

01:18:09

One guy tells the story of, she got the mother of Mutaw who was a—she was a nun in Grand Coteau—and she decided one day that she was going to put--get each Congressman's wife to crochet or whatever a blanket and they were going to auction it for sale. Well the phone call, according to Tommy, her--her son—there was a phone call. And Tommy says, *Mom, I think you need to take this call.* It's Ladybird Johnson and she's saying, *Lindy, I would really like to crochet something.* But—and her son, Tommy, is singularly--in my opinion the most powerful lobbyist in Washington, DC. Her daughter is—what's her name on--on--

01:19:13

SR: On NPR?

01:19:14

DB: No, she's—is she on NPR? Well she's part of it. Anyhow, and the other daughter who died was the--was the Governor of New Jersey.

01:19:26

SR: Oh my.

01:19:28

DB: Yeah, I mean and—.

01:19:32

SR: Cokie Roberts.

01:19:34

DB: Cokie Roberts. So I mean this is the kind of family that these people are and it's—I mean she really, she's just so gracious, and then Mrs. Ella [Brennan] took over where here husband had started with. I think they--I think they were Italian. I'm not sure.

01:19:55

SR: You think they were what?

01:19:57

DB: Italian—the Brennan(s). And I mean what a dynasty they have built, you know. Who-- who's the top chefs in the world? Notably, say well in the US, and it all started with her—Paul Prudhomme or Emeril or you know the whole—. See Marcelle worked—that's how they all met. Marcelle Bienvenu from St. Martinville, she worked with Mrs. Ella. And I mean there's been some really interesting people come out of that--very interesting.

01:20:25

SR: Do you still get to New Orleans to eat?

01:20:28

DB: Uh-hm, I love New Orleans. My favorite is Tujague’s and Chicken Bonne Femme.

[Laughs] I guess there’s enough evil in me I like--I need a lot of garlic. **[Laughs]**

01:20:42

SR: So I was noticing here that it seems like your lunch clientele today is—seems local.

01:20:50

DB: Oh yeah; oh yeah. Oh yeah probably so. I’m not sure who these guys are *[gestures]*. The tables that you saw lined up here, they were all from *[around here]*. If you walk outside you’ll see literally license plates from all over--all over the country. I think we’ve got--we’ve gained a lot—most of our attention has been because of the Zydeco breakfast thing, and it’s a big, big, big thing outside of Louisiana, although it’s pretty strong here. But we get somewhere around 800 hits a day on our computer because when they look up “Zydeco breakfast” or when they look up “Zydeco,” “Zydeco breakfast” is the first thing that you see. And there’s so many bloggers out of California and New York and—. The *Wall Street Journal* did an article some years ago and they pointed out this tremendous interest that there is. And there’s--there’s so many people who just, you know they constantly want to know where the musicians are playing, where they’re going, and I guess we have kind of been adopted as the cathedral down here. **[Laughs]** Because you know for the longest of time whites didn’t go to the black dance halls. In fact they’re fixing to put this one—the Smithsonian is interested in it; I think they’re going to finally move it to Vermilionville. It was Hamilton’s Nightclub and on Wednesday night they had *white night*, so the whites could go and dance on Wednesday night. And so what’s happened here purely by accident is, you’re seeing here—well I guess we probably are--we certainly were the first white

place that black musicians came to play. In fact that's what the *Wall Street Journal* said. The phenomena consisted of—they likened Zydeco to where Jazz was at the turn of the last century. And they said the difference here at the Café Des Amis is that the musicians can come in through the front door. *[Laughs]*

01:23:23

SR: And how long have you been doing that?

01:23:26

DB: About eight years.

01:23:29

SR: And so you have Zydeco breakfast, and do you also have Zydeco at night?

01:23:34

DB: Wednesday nights we do primarily Cajun or Swing type music and Saturday morning [Zydeco]. That happened—Festival International [de Louisiane] in Lafayette is a big--truly big international festival rated way up in the top three in the world probably. And there were two members of Parliament from France and two from England who were visiting here and they wanted to put on a typical Cajun breakfast. And Philippe Gustin with the City of Lafayette—he's with the Consulate from France and Canada--French. He brought these musicians here and it just caught on. Everyone else has tried it and it doesn't seem to work. The synergy that occurred—well you saw it.

01:24:34

SR: Yeah, yeah, it's great.

01:24:36

DB: I mean it's just—and what it is, it's an interaction with the band and the dancers you know. The band knows every dancer and the dancer knows everybody in the band. I mean it's just—so it's almost like a Broadway play when you come here. The interaction between the two of them is just phenomenal and I've never seen anybody walk out of here that wasn't at least smiling.

01:25:06

SR: Do you dance?

01:25:06

DB: Yeah, uh-huh. I haven't been dancing in a while. My position is—they're often teasing me they're going to bronze me in that chair. I sit right here. What we have--our biggest problem here is keeping it flowing. Everybody wants to--to see what's going on over here and they--they congregate right there. And see where that line is right there? And my job the whole day is [to say], *Guys, they can't get in and out of the kitchen as long as you're standing there.* So I mean I'm really getting worn out.

01:25:49

SR: You're the bodyguard?

01:25:52

DB: It's about that, and you know after you've told them six times to move, you know it gets aggravating and I lose my temper. But I mean it's—the only thing that has saved us is that the-- the Fire Marshal doesn't work on Saturday [*Laughs*] because they'd close us down sure as shit.

01:26:15

SR: I'm going to have to get in here again. I bet that reservations for the Maison Des Amis [bed and breakfast nearby] for Friday night are probably pretty hard to get.

01:26:24

DB: I don't—we sold it. It was the only way to get rid of the goddess of the moon. [*Laughs*]

01:26:32

SR: All right. Well I'm going—I could talk to you forever but I'm going to let you have the day.

01:26:40

DB: Let me see what's on this; you need to eat something before you go.

01:26:43

SR: Well thank you for giving me your time.

01:26:47

DB: I'll get you something to eat; let me see what's the special.

01:26:47

[End Gumbo-Dickie Breaux Interview]