
FULL TRANSCRIPT:

SUBJECT: Floria Woodard, bartender @
The Court of Two Sisters
613 Royal Street
New Orleans, LA 70130

DATE: March 31, 2005 @ 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: The Court of Two Sisters bar

INTERVIEWER: Amy Evans

LENGTH: Approx. 42 minutes

NOTE: Various sounds occur throughout this interview. Rather than mention them individually and interrupt the flow of the conversation, they are noted here: the restaurant staff can be heard in the background from time to time setting up for service, various voices can be heard in conversation, and the noise of a vacuum cleaner appears in portions of the audio. When the occurring sounds are an obvious interruption to the interview, they are noted in the transcript.

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Amy Evans: This is Thursday, March thirty-first, two thousand and five, and I'm in New Louisiana in the French Quarter on Royal Street at The Court of Two Sisters with Floria known as Miss Flo—a bartender here. And, um, Miss Flo, would you mind saying your whole name for the record?

Floria Woodard: My name is Floria Woodard, and I'm old as dirt. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs] You don't look near old as dirt!

FW: [Laughing] Oh!

AE: May I ask your birthday?

FW: My birthday is six, six, thirty-eight [June 6, 1938].

AE: Okay. And I understand you've been working here at The Court of Two Sisters for forty years or some such thing.

FW: It's close to forty. It's thirty-eight years this February seventh, two thousand five.

AE: Yeah?

FW: And I've enjoyed it ever since I've been here. I've been—I started out here as a bus person and a server for so many years. And then I moved up

to seating captain, from seating captain to receiving at the front door, and then one day they decided they [were] going to give me a bartender's job. [Short laugh]

AE: Just out of the blue?

FW: Just out of the blue, yes.

AE: Well, and I read in this article that's on the wall here at the bar that you were the first black server here at The Court of Two Sisters and so—

FW: In the evening, yes.

AE: In the evening?

FW: In the evening. And that was starting back in sixty-eight. And even though it was integrated—they was integrated like in the daytime—at nighttime it wasn't. Or they couldn't get [black] servers, I'm not sure what the cause was. But I had no problem getting acceptance. They accepted me with open arms. And I came in, and I liked the place, and I decided to stay for a little while.

AE: Yeah? Well, just to back up a little bit, you said [before we started recording that] you're from Mississippi originally.

FW: Yes, born and raised in Tylertown, Mississippi. Uh, I come from a large family. Uh, from eleven siblings that's alive, that I'm the youngest of all.

AE: And what brought you to New Orleans?

FW: Survival. [Laughs] You know, survival? That's what it was. It was nothing in Mississippi to do as far as work-wise, and if you couldn't farm you couldn't—you wasn't making anything. It was really tough for the people of color in Mississippi. Mm-hmm. It's tough.

AE: Was the job here the first job you had in New Orleans, or did you work other places?

FW: No, it wasn't. I did other jobs. I worked, um, as a home keeper for children for a while, and then I did hotel maid service for a while, and I did healthcare for a little while. But then I decided none of those was for me.

AE: Well, all [those jobs are] wrapped up here in this bar, I think. Healthcare—

FW: Uh-huh!

AE: —homecare—and you have a customer.

FW: And so I—

[Three ladies walk up to the bar to order drinks]

FW: Uh-huh. Excuse me.

AE: Sure thing.

FW: [To customer] What you need, baby?

CUSTOMER: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

[END TRACK 1 – COUNTER: 03:07]

[BEGIN TRACK 2]

AE: Okay, well we were talking about how you were given the opportunity to become a bartender here—

FW: Well, they—

AE: Did they just throw you into the fire?

FW: Yeah, they just threw me into the fire. Into the—into the lake and said swim!

AE: [Laughs]

FW: No—no paddle either!

AE: Yeah?

FW: Yeah, when they put me in over here they hadn't [had] anyone at all to train me. I really had to train myself. I had to learn everything back here, and I had a lot of reading to do. I had a lot bar-guide books. And there—they have a recipe book themselves [The Court of two Sisters], so I don't make the drinks the way I want to drink—to make them. I make them the way they want them made.

AE: Right.

FW: So that means I follow their recipe. So if you have a drink from me today that you'd enjoy, tomorrow or next month or two years from now, when you return, it *will* be the same because you use the same recipe.

AE: There's a formula that you follow—

FW: Yes.

AE: —for success. I see.

FW: Exactly.

AE: Do you have a cocktail that you enjoy making more so than others?

FW: I enjoy making a Mint Julep, and I enjoy making a Sazerac. Sazerac were the first cocktail that was called *coquetier*, which was made a by a pharmacy. He was New Orleans. And he made it to cure anything that ails you. So—we call it the potion.

AE: The potion. [Laughs]

FW: [Laughs]

AE: Do you get a lot of calls for the Sazerac?

FW: Yes, very much so. It's a big—it's a big deal here.

AE: Do you have a lot of those [ordered] in the morning or in the evening or is there a certain time of day when people prefer to have them?

FW: Mostly in the mid-day or evening. Never too much in the morning. It's a very potent drink. It's sort of like a Mint Julep [short pause] bu—because they're very strong. But at the same time, they are—if it's cold outside, it warms you from [the] inside out. It's like a stimulant.

AE: Yeah.

FW: That warms you up. So I always tell the northern people, like when they're always drinking hot things, "If you want something to warm you up, take the recipe for the Sazerac and you'll be nice and— [laughs] you'll be nice and warm."

AE: Sure.

FW: Yes.

AE: And so the Brandy Milk Punch is more of an early day drink that y'all sell a lot of.

FW: Yes, more of a breakfast drink. Brandy Milk Punch. The Ramos Gin Fizz. Both of those are made from milk, and they are totally different. Brandy milk punch sort of tastes like a milkshake. A little vanilla in it, sugar and milk and cream. But the Ramos Gin Fizz is very—very nutritious. [Laughs] Very much,

uh, it's own flavor. It's very nutritious. [Laughs] [some of the ingredients in a Ramos Gin Fizz are: lemon juice, orange juice, milk and an egg white]

AE: So when you were learning to make all these cocktails from the recipes that the restaurant provided you, was there kind of a learning curve for New Orleans history and the history of the cocktail in New Orleans to kind of go along with the recipes?

FW: Not really. Not really. I just kind of learned all that as I went, uh, from bar to bar myself. [Laughs]

AE: Oh, yeah? You trained yourself out in the streets, huh? [Laughs]

FW: Yeah. [Laughing] I trained myself in the streets.

AE: Well and the bar here has this listing of old New Orleans cocktails and Court Specials. Can you talk about some of those? Like the French 75 and the Two Sisters Toddy.

FW: Okay, the French 75 should be an old drink. You can get it anyplace. But the Two Sisters Toddy is a Court of Two Sisters drink. It was also picked—made—prepared here. And it sells very well also. Matter of fact, all of them on the board sell very well. But you also have the, uh, Golden Coconut, which I won first place in the bartender's contest in the French Quarter Fest. They do, uh, French Quarter Fest, and they do the—about ten, fifteen bartenders—and they do a contest. I entered that about five, six years. And every time I entered, I won.

WOMAN: Look at those flowers! Are those yours? [short pause] Are those your flowers? [To Floria]

FW: Yes, my friends—my friends from San Diego brought them in.

WOMAN: Ohhh.

FW: Because I lost my sister. [Floria had just returned from her sister's funeral in Chicago the day before our interview.]

[Short pause]

WOMAN: Well, they're beautiful.

FW: Well thank you, darling. [To interviewer now] And, uh, where was I—Oh, the Golden Coconut.

AE: What goes in that?

FW: [What] goes in that is amaretto, Malibu rum, orange curacao and milk. And you sh—and it looks sort of like a brandy milk punch, except it tastes similar to a Pina—a Pina Colada.

AE: Okay. **[TRACK 2 - COUNTER: 05:11]**

FW: So--It's very good.

AE: Well, and I heard that you won—there may not have been an award involved—but that you make a better Hurricane than Pat O'Brien's [the bar that invented the drink].

FW: That too. I was involved into this contest and beat them out. Uh, and matter of fact, it was presented at the same time of the Golden Coconut. And I got the two awards: for the Hurricane and the drink—and the Golden Coconut.

AE: So what do you think that your special twist on those drinks is that makes them so—

FW: I think it's all because I use measurements. Uh, most bartenders like to free-pour, and I think measurements make a lot of difference. That it makes them not too overpowering but taste good. See, one thing about making drinks, you can give a person and drink, and if it's too strong, they're not going to enjoy it because it's really to strong for you. You're going to want something to cut it down. But I try to make mine just right. If you have two or three [drinks] back to back, it'll be like you're taking the first one. It won't be overpowering.

AE: You take pride in that consistency.

FW: Mmm, yes, I do. Consistency makes a big difference. I tell all the bartenders that because they are under me in their own way. But I call them as equals. I am, um, [short pause] labeled as a bar manager as well. And they taking--a lot of things they might know more than I about certain drinks—

WOMAN 2: Pretty flowers! Excuse me [to interviewer]

AE: You're fine. You're fine.

FW: [To woman] Right. Hey, sweetie. [Floria and the woman hug each other] Thank you so much. [To interviewer] And, uh, they would take and listen to me because they learn—the ones that's here—they learn that consistency makes a difference. And now they like to do it the same way. As I tell them all, "The bars, they hire bartenders. We are not bartenders here. [short pause] We are mixologists." [Hearty laugh] I think that's pretty sweet, you know?

AE: Yeah.

FW: So they take a little pride in their work as well. I—I have one bartender, he's been here for about fourteen years, and I think another one for twelve.
Yeah

AE: And did you train them both?

FW: Yes, I trained them both.

AE: So what is it about this job that has kept you behind the bar for forty years? What do you like about it?

FW: I really enjoy it. I enjoy meeting the people. I enjoy my management staff. And the owners, they treat me very well. And I think, if you can have an owner of a business to respect you enough to treat you well and don't treat you differently. As, you know—just what you are. You didn't ask for no special favors. Just for what you are? I think it goes a long ways.

AE: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

FW: I think it goes a long ways. And, uh, all their friends love me. They all come up. I could have twenty of them sitting at this bar right now, and there could be three bartenders back here. Guess whose name they call? All at the same time!

AE: [Laughs]

FW: I say, "Okay. But they do have some more bartenders here, you know!"
[Laughs]

AE: Everybody wants you.

FW: Yes, yes.

AE: So do you get a good kind of mix of tourists, locals and regular customers?

FW: Yes, yes. Very much so.

AE: What do the regulars tend to drink?

FW: Well, they drink a mixed drink—a mixture everything. I have about four of them—maybe ten—I'll might be as far as ten—that loves the Sazeracs. And this here is a club [points down to the bar between us, where there are brass nameplates lining the top of the bar's surface]. It's the friend's—

AE: The Court Jesters?

FW: —friends of my bosses, which their names is listed on the bar. They are there because once they got invited to join the club, their name goes on the bar. They have a membership fee that they give every three months. And they meet once a month out of every month—one day out of every month. And they have lunch. And it's about ten of them that drink Sazeracs all the time.

AE: Oh, really?

FW: Yeah.

AE: So then—

FW: [Coughs]

AE: —it's a place of honor to have your name on this bar right here.

FW: Oooh, they feel so honored. They send their friends in and they—with their friends—and want to show them that their name is on the bar. Mm-hmm.

AE: Well what is it, do you think, about New Orleans and all of these signature cocktails in the city and all of these restaurants that have, you know, signature cocktails specific to them? Does that make certain restaurants more popular, or is it something that people can just talk about and enjoy or—What do you think that is? **[TRACK 2 - COUNTER: 10:21]**

FW: Well, I think the signature is that they want something that you can't get anyplace else and that makes [the restaurants or bars] popular for that drink, you know. Uh, like Pat O'Brien's has the Hurricane? They was the one that started the Hurricane. But now you get Hurricanes all over, but they're never the same. You can have one by me and one down the street by Joe is not going to be the same because people use different mixtures.

AE: Do you have some good memorable stories about people coming through the bar? Anybody notable or—

FW: Well, I have a story but—it's not that big. It's not that long. But had Caesar Romero [as a customer]. He came to visit back in the [nineteen] seventies, and I enjoyed him very much. He's a very nice guy.

AE: Do you remember what he had to drink?

FW: No. [Laughs] No, I don't remember what he had to drink. But I tell you, he was dressed in black.

AE: Okay.

FW: [Laughs] And he was—he was a very nice guy. I don't know all the names of the—real names—of the movie people. But the guy that played Mannix [in the movie of the same name. Actor Mike Connors.] He was good. He was—came in many times. He's was a nice person. I had, uh, Radar. Hi, baby [to another employee]. He was here. He came in many times.

AE: Radar from [the television show] *M*A*S*H*?

FW: From *M*A*S*H*, yeah. And that's "Hot Lips" right there [points across the room to a framed photograph of Loretta Swit, who played "Hot Lips" Houlihan [on the show]. Uh-huh.

AE: Oh, okay. Yeah, I see her.

FW: Yeah, she came in too. She came in. She was a doll. And [the character of] Radar, he was a doll. And he came in and, uh—he liked to play music. I didn't know he played music.

AE: I didn't either.

FW: He used to come in and sit in with the band. He'd bring his family in, and he would sit in—and he would bring an instrument, and he would sit in with the band when he was on vacation so—it was—it was really nice to have those people in. But she [Loretta Swit]—she came in by herself, and she was sitting in the same chair you are sitting in now [second-to-last stool on the right end of the bar]. And I really was just working. I didn't—I was talking to her, and I didn't know who she was. Until my boss looked at me—my GM [General Manager]—he looked at me and he said, "Flo, who's that?" And I said, "I don't know. A customer." [Laughs] And so then he really got—he said, you know, [Sound of employee vacuuming in background. Overpowers the next couple of minutes of audio] "That's La—something. Lynn or whatever her name is." I said, "That's—I didn't know." He said, "Yeah, Hot Lips." I said, "Oh, the nurse. Okay." Don't say that I'm not good with names because I've never have been able to watch TV a lot. Uh, maybe not even watch a whole story either. If I don't be leaving, I'll be going to sleep.

AE: So do you usually work nights? Have you always worked nights?

FW: No, I've had every shift. When I started out, I started out on the day shift. [Vacuuming ends] [Floria to another employee] Did you find it, Mike? [vacuuming resumes] Are they both filled, Mike? [To interviewer] Excuse me, baby.

AE: Sure.

[Recording is stopped for a few minutes while Floria gives her attention to another employee and so the vacuuming task can be completed before we resume.]

[END TRACK 2 – COUNTER: 13:50]

[BEGIN TRACK 3]

[Before resuming the interview, Floria was asking me what was going to be done with the interview. It will be housed in the archives at the library of the University of Mississippi, as well as the Southern Foodways Alliance's own archives, which are at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the university.]

FW: Two universities, huh?

AE: It will be in the archive of the University of Mississippi, yes ma'am.

FW: And I'm in, uh [short pause] Tulane University.

AE: Are you? Is that what that's from? That piece? [Interviewer points to the end of the bar where there is a framed story on Floria with a photograph of her at the bar.] Okay.

FW: Uh-huh.

AE: Yeah, that's a lovely article.

FW: Another woman was doing an essay at Tulane University, and she—they had to write about someone that's not important—you know, really, up there. They wanted [an] average person. So she found me through my general manager.

AE: Oh, wow.

FW: And she called and asked for an interview, as you have. And--she caught me off guard too.

AE: Yeah? [Short laugh] "Why me?"

FW: Yes! And—oh my God, how did I get so wanted, you know?

AE: [Laughs]

FW: And, uh, so she—I was working up and down [the bar], up and down, and I was telling a couple of stories about the old days. When you all [young people] don't remember. I don't—I mean don't [know] anything about too much unless you read it in a book. And she said, "Miss Flo," she said, "how

old are you?" I said, "Oh, my God." I said—I said the wrong word—because it was—I was talking about days back up till the fifties, and she didn't think I was that old. And I said, "Oh yeah, baby. I'm up there. I'm getting ready to go out for retirement real soon!" So she said [that] I didn't look like it. But now, the one little story I'm going to tell about myself, which is not about drinks, is the fact that I just came on a—off of a trip to Chicago. My sister died. And I went as a senior citizen, and I had to ID—they ID'd me! [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

FW: I thought that was funny. I had laughed! It was too fun—too much fun!

AE: [Laughs] Well and so what is it about your job that keeps you here, if you're—you know, up towards retiring.

FW: I think it's the stress. [Laughs]

AE: You like the stress? Crave the stress?

FW: [Laughing] That's a joke.

AE: Yeah?

FW: Well, I enjoy it, sweetie.

AE: Yeah.

FW: I don't think it's no one thing, but I always feel like what keep[s] me going, I'm not a lazy person. I like to work. [Vacuuming in background again] As long as I'm working, I'm happy. Because I know I'm gonna get paid. [Vacuuming stops] And as I tell all the young people that come through here, you know, you're looking at thirty-eight years, and I can't remember one payday [that] I didn't get a check. You know? And that's what work is all about. It's a shame to say it, but we're working until we get paid, because we can't survive without it.

AE: Oh, sure.

FW: So that's—that's what it is again. I stay here for survival! [Laughs]

AE: Yeah. And do you drink yourself?

FW: I used to drink like a fish.

AE: Oh, yeah! [Laughs]

FW: And I did well. It didn't stop me from doing—you know, it didn't stop me from doing my job. But I don't drink too much anymore. I got—I got a little

wise with the years. Uh, I learned my body just don't want to handle it. My mind wanted it; my body has said no.

AE: What did you used to drink?

FW: Well, from one time to another, I would drink different things from one to another. Uh, when I first started drinking, I was drinking like Jack [Daniel's] and Coke. And then I went from Jack and Coke to scotch. From scotch to vodka. And then form vodka to Crown [Royal]. So I changed—

AE: Just working your way around the bar, huh?

FW: Yeah, I worked all around—all of them. And then—but I never did like gin. I tasted gin, but I never did like gin. It just—

AE: It makes you mean.

FW: It—you know, I say the same—you're the first person that has said those words like me.

AE: It's the truth! It's the truth.

FW: I—the reason why I *know* it makes you mean? I knew three people that drank the gin, and when they drank the gin, they were *mean*. It was personal experiences that [told me] they were mean. And when my—I tell people that it makes you mean? See, it does. It's something in there that makes them mean. I mean, you don't have to do them anything, and they'll turn on you just like—you know? Like—that be something. Because it mess[es] up your brain or something.

AE: Yeah. Well do have people that come in here just to experience a New Orleans cocktail, or do you have people that sit at the bar from hours on end just—

FW: Oh, yes! I do.

AE: —getting mean! [Laughs]

FW: Not getting mean. [Laughs]

AE: Yeah, just hanging out.

FW: The longer they stay they get happier. And I have younger people and older people. It's such a relaxing place. Even though it's a bar. You really—[it] really doesn't reel like you're sitting in a bar. It's—because the people are passing by going [through to the dining room] to eat, or to dinner

or going to breakfast or whatever. It's just so pleasant to sit and watch the people go by and enjoy it.

AE: Yeah, it is a nice place. **[TRACK 3 - COUNTER: 5:22]**

FW: You know.

AE: So do all the drinks that are served in the restaurant come from this bar also?

FW: Come from this bar only. And sometimes—most days, it's only one bartender. We only bring in an extra person when there's a certain amount of people on the [reservation] books that we know. Now, sometimes you get—fortunately—that you call it right. And sometimes you don't.

AE: You get stuck, huh?

FW: And then you get stuck. And you got to—you got to pull yourself out. You got to reach down and get them boots, pull it out, and go on.

AE: Are there a lot of folks who tend to come for dinner, who order the specialty cocktails and keep you on your toes?

FW: Oh, yeah. Lots of them. And even in the daytime, really. They, uh—lots of them.

MALE EMPLOYEE: Hey, Flo.

FW: [To employee] Hi, sweetheart. How are you?

EMPLOYEE: [To interviewer] How are you?

AE: [To employee] Hey, I'm good, thank you.

FW: [To interviewer] They be wanting to, uh, try them at lunchtime. Not so early in the morning but in the afternoon.

AE: Is there something that you just don't like to make because it takes too much time or it's too much trouble?

FW: [Shakes head "no"] Not a thing. I make them all. Because, as I say again, if you don't put the love and tenderness [in] there with that, it's not going to taste good. So you take your time—I mean, you're rushing. You're doing that, but—but you take your time, and you make it right. Because I—I—I—as I tell my bartenders, "If it don't taste good, you can't sell it." You see? "What you mean, Miss Flo?" This is my new bartender I just got about two months ago. He says[s], "What you mean?" I say, "Just like I said, baby. If it don't taste good, you can't sell it. Nobody wants to pay for nothing that

don't taste good!" [Laughs] He say[s], "Oh, I never heard it like that before." He's about twenty-five [years old]. And I say, "I'm sorry, Cliff, but there's enough you haven't heard of to make a new book!" [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs] Do you have a lot of people that come to work here that haven't had much bartending experience or—

FW: Oh, yes! I'll train—if they're trainable, I'll train them. And, uh, I have taken them who have never had—not an hour behind the bar. They'd served them, but they had never made them. And I—I—I've taken them in and taught them how to make [drinks].

AE: What do you think it takes to make a good bartender?

FW: Well, you have to like people, you have to have a cool personality, and you have to be patient. You cannot be [short pause] a chip on your shoulder that you have, you leave it at home. You can't bring it in because [if] someone make[s] a statement to you that you don't like, you can't be touchy about things. See I've had people sit here at the bar and speak up [about] different things that's going on, and black people are involved—it doesn't affect me. Because that's news. But you'll find some people—people of color would get offended. You'll find the gay part of the industry. You're speaking of the gay people, they'll get affected. But no, you can't—you can't do that. You've got to be open when you [are] tending bar. The only thing that I don't do is—like I say earlier—I don't have stories to tell. I tell stories, but they're the truth—true stories. Something that has happened. But, uh, just—just remember jokes—most people that—think of a bartender as a joker. They can tell all the jokes and all that? I could never remember the punch line! [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

FW: I thought—I can't remember the punch line! I go to tell the story, then I go, "Oh, what was the punch line? I don't remember!"

AE: [Laughs]

FW: I don't remember. [Short pause] But, uh, it's a lot of—I could—I think how I last here so long and enjoy it, even though it's in the heart of the French Quarter? It's *not* Bourbon Street. I think if I was there, it [would] have done burned me out. But this is not Bourbon Street. I done had some tough days in here. And I say tough, I mean running! It would be three to four [people] deep around this bar. Probably six servers in the window at all times. And sometimes I get burnt out and so—sometimes it's just two of us [behind the bar] and I go, "I'm looking for my mama! I'm looking for my mama!"

AE: [Laughs]

FW: "I need my mama!" That's what I do. I go, "Je-sus! Where you at? Je-sus!" [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

[Short pause]

[Recording is stopped again for a few minutes, as Floria walks over to greet some new customers who just approached the bar.]

[END TRACK 3 – COUNTER: 10:20]

[BEGIN TRACK 4]

[Just background noise for the first eight seconds of this track]

FEMALE EMPLOYEE: Oh, Miss Flo, you got any towels?

FW: I don't think so, baby.

EMPLOYEE: I thought you might have them hidden on you. I know you like to hide yours. [Laughs]

FW: [Laughs] They haven't brought them up yet.

EMPLOYEE: They're like gold over here, right?

FW: He hasn't brought them up yet.

EMPLOYEE: Who's working tonight? Ray [last name unintelligible]?

FW: I think so.

EMPLOYEE: We're going to have to get on him! Everybody's got problems.

FW: [Laughs] I know you can do it, honey.

[Short pause]

FW: Oh, yes indeed. [To interviewer] I'm sorry, honey. I just walked away from you.

AE: No, you're fine. You're on the clock. [Laughs]

FW: [Laughs] Yeah, I'm very sorry.

AE: You're fine.

[Flo takes a some time to work on setting up her bar. Thirteen second pause in conversation]

FW: [Coughs]

AE: Do you have a lot of regular customers like your friends from San Diego who--

FW: Uh-huh.

AE: --sent you those flowers?

FW: I have quite a few. Different ones from all over the world that comes by every year or two. Sometimes a year back to back. Some of them come [sound of ice being poured] every two years. Some of them might come every five years. But they remember [me], and I think it's so sweet. My boss always tells me, he says, "You have all these people coming here [and] looking for you." I say, "Yeah." See, I was trying to retire. He say, "What the people going to do? They going to be looking for you."

AE: [Laughs]

FW: I say, "Oh, well they'll get over it. You'll have another bartender back there." So I've been semi-retired since [the year] two thousand.

AE: Oh, okay.

FW: But now, I'm working five days and more. [Laughs] But I'm still semi-retired. But I have to say that [short pause] when you are a---[to a server] What you looking for, Francis?

FRANCIS: Cups.

[Sound of ice going into a glass. Ten-second pause]

FW: Now this is my good friend Francis. [To Francis] Francis, come on this side [of the bar].

[Flo introduces the interviewer to a male server who has approached the bar before his shift begins]

AE: Hi, Francis.

FRANCIS: [With Spanish accent] How are you doing?

AE: I'm well, thank you.

FW: This is my good friend Francis, who started here about three or four months before I.

FRANCIS: Before her.

AE: Oh, okay.

FW: And he trained me to be a bus person.

FRANCIS: Uh-huh.

FW: He never moved--after he made his waiter position to serve--he never moved his—but I moved on up. But he stayed waiter--he's still a waiter, and this is his first job he ever had.

AE: Oh, my goodness.

FRANCIS: In the United States.

FW: That's what I'm talking about. First job.

AE: [To Francis] Where are you from?

FRANCIS: Spain.

FW: From Spain.

AE: Where in Spain?

FRANCIS: Toledo.

AE: Toledo, I've been there.

FRANCIS: Oh, yeah?

AE: Si.

FRANCIS: Si!

FW: [To Francis] See, I'm going to have you in my paper.

FRANCIS: Oh, okay.

AE: [Laughs]

FW: In my write-up, you see?

FRANCIS: [To interviewer] Where are you from?

AE: I'm from Houston, Texas, but I live in Oxford, Mississippi.

FRANCIS: Oh, okay.

AE: I work for the University of Mississippi.

FRANCIS: Oh, okay.

FW: It's going to be—it's going to be in the Mississippi University paper. [To interviewer] Am I correct?

AE: It will be in the archive there.

FW: Archive?

AE: Maybe someday in the paper, sure.

FW: That's what I meant to say, in *their* paper—in the archive.

AE: Yeah.

FRANCIS: Library.

FW: Library. It's going to be in the library.

FRANCIS: [To Flo] Who, you?

FW: [And] you now!

FRANCIS: Me?

AE: She's a living legend, as are you, now that I know you.

FW: [To Francis] You are too!

FRANCIS: Oh, okay.

FW: So that's why I brought you over.

FRANCIS: Thank you.

AE: [To Francis] I'm Amy Evans by the way.

FRANCIS: Okay. What's your name?

AE: Amy Evans.

FRANCIS: Amy Evans? Nice to meet you.

AE: Yes. Nice to meet you.

FW: Mmm-hmm.

[Francis leans over and kisses the interviewer's hand]

AE: Thank you, Francis!

FRANCIS: Francisco! Francisco Mendez. Francisco. Francis here, you know.

AE: Yeah.

FW: Uh-huh.

FW: Yes, indeed.

FRANCIS: Well, nice to have you here, okay?

AE: Yes, nice to meet you.

FRANCIS: Take care. Have a good time, okay?

[Francis walks away]

FW: All right, Francis. [To interviewer] He was a doll. He was handsome! Oh, but he wouldn't marry me.

AE: [Hearty laugh] Uh-oh!

FW: He married—he married one of those—one of his people.

AE: Yeah. [Laughs]

FW: But he was so sweet. He told me, "You can do it. You can do it." I guess he said, "If I can do it, you can do it." Because when I came here, I had never been inside of a fine dining room. I don't—I don't pretend that I had or I had not. I just tell the truth. See, I tell--I have stories to tell, but they're not stories, they're facts, you know? And when I walk in here, and I had to put all the silver on the table [I thought] what in the heck are we going to do with all that silver! [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

FW: All you need is a knife, a fork and a spoon. I mean, what else do you need, right!

AE: Right. **[TRACK 4 – COUNTER: 04:37]**

FW: That's—that--I would—and it was so funny because when I would set a table, if I didn't have it right, the manager that hired me—that, uh, when I could look back at a table, one side would be turned up. And [the tablecloth] would be turned up on the table. And I'd go, "Who messed up my table?" And then, uh, he'd look at me, and he's say, "You." [Laughs]

AE: Oh, because you didn't do it right the first time.

FW: Right. Exactly. Exactly.

AE: [Laugh]

FW: But I loved him, and I appreciated him because he made me. He made me be good. And I was—and I was good. We would take and serve—I could carry twenty entrees on a tray.

AE: Oh, my.

FW: It was—it was really good. It was--but at that time, we would—the—[with the] kids today, it's not like family. See, when me and Francis started and everybody--like the waiters—everybody was like one big family. Helped everyone. If you was in a hole, we got you out of that hole. We didn't look for none of your tip or none of your money like that. We just worked and got you out. Next time if it was me, they pulled me out of the hole. But that didn't happen too often.

AE: Is there a lot more turnover now than there was--?

FW: Yeah, very much so. Very much so.

AE: So what got you from waiting tables to bartending? Do you--are you glad that you made that switch or—

FW: I—

AE: --do you miss waiting tables?

FW: What made me make the move was, I was older, and I was thinking of retirement time. Because we were not doing everything lawfully as we were supposed to, and I went like, I'm not going to have no Social Security. So I better I better make a move. Either I better start paying it in, or I better get me a different job that will pay it for me. So that's what made me do this.

AE: Yeah. Do you have a family of your own?

FW: I have one daughter. One daughter and one grandson. And no greats. So it's only the three of us. My daughter—

AE: And you've supported them all these years with this job?

FW: All these years and still is!

AE: Yeah. [Short laugh]

FW: I mean, when is it going to end? [She's] fifty years old! And still, "Mom, I need lunch money." Oh, yeah? Uh, "Gramma, I need a hair cut." Oh, yeah? I say, "Go get it. I don't have nothing to do with your car. You go drive your own car and get you a hair cut."

AE: Do you think there's any difference between, um, a female bartender or a male bartender? In the business in general and in New Orleans, specifically?

FW: I personally don't think so unless you get—well, we have different class[es] of our people in the bar business. You have some that's--let's say that's professional and some is just—I call them shots and beer people. They're not mixologists; they're shots and beer people. That's a different—that's the difference I see in the bartending. Uh, a lot of people been in the bar business like fifteen, twenty years? They couldn't work for me [short pause] because I got too many mixed drinks to make. When I say mixed drinks, I'm *mixing*, you know. Like theirs—they make mixed drinks, they think, when they give you a Kahlua and milk and a scotch and soda and whatever. That's a mixed drink to them. But that's not a mixed drink, you know, out of my book. But, uh, so that's a difference I see in the bartending business. Uh, as I said to them when I--when they gave me this job, I—I had worked bar before. I had [short pause] served drinks before. But, like I told them, I wasn't a bartender; I was a beer and half-a-pint server. The half-a-pint was on the shelf, I pulled down a half-a-pint, got a pitcher of water, five cokes or whatever, and chang-chitty-chang. [Slaps palm on bar.] That's not bartending.

AE: Where was that that you did that?

FW: That was in the black—in the—in the, uh, people of color bar rooms. They—see, they didn't have much money, so they wanted as much as they could get for their money. So you would do a set-up.

AE: Right.

FW: They'd say, "Give me a set-up of Crown [Royal] with two Cokes and two Seven-Ups." So they might buy a half a pint or a whole pint of liquor, but then you've got five or six people drinking out of that. So that's the way they

bought their liquor—they laid it out. So I worked at a bar like that for a spell. But they didn't tip. [Hearty laugh]

AE: No?

FW: Yeah, they didn't tip. Yeah, but then you can't expect them to. They didn't make much money. It's just—they've got enough to pay for the bottle. [Laughs]

AE: Yeah.

FW: So that's another thing I tell the bartenders. Sometimes we be upset because we don't get a tip from someone. Well I tell them you can't get upset when the schoolteachers come in, when the, uh, when the, uh, the hardware people come in, you can't be upset. I say---[to a male employee] I just sent cups back there. Francis just took cups back there.

EMPLOYEE: Oh, I don't see them. I don't see any.

FW: Not more than five minutes [ago]. [Back to interviewer] And we get upset, but they—they not making a hell of a lot of money, you know? And they—and they had to save up to get down here with that convention because they needed that money to do other things with, I'm sure. But I say, the service end of the business--like us—we were—we always did make money, so we always did over-tip. We always did. Uh, when people talk about tipping fifteen percent, twenty percent, if we didn't tip twenty-five, thirty or forty percent, we didn't tip at all. But the bartender always did—if he was a bartender. Uh, they always over-tipped.

AE: Respect your own, right? **[TRACK 4 – COUNTER: 10:43]**

FW: Uh-huh. Exactly. Exactly.

AE: Do you have any service industry people who come to your bar after they get off shifts?

FW: No. No, I don't have no—no—no, uh, service industry [people] that come at the bar at all. Every once in a while one or two will come in that work down the street. I had a few came in when I was retiring in two thousand.

AE: [Laughs]

FW: Because they couldn't believe that I had been here that long. They was coming in just to see me. I say, "No, I don't have no tail." [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

FW: They said, "No, Miss Flo. We just wanted to meet you." You know, two nice young men. [Coughs] And the next time I look up there's somebody else peeping to see who that bartender was because they had read it in the newspaper, you see?

AE: Yeah.

FW: Because the *[Times] Picayune* picked up my retirement. That was really lovely too. They wrote it up in the newspaper. But every time they, uh, look at me, and I'm here, they go, "You sure you're retiring?!" [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

FW: I say, "Yes, but they won't let me go!" You know. They won't let me go, you know.

AE: So what do you think is the key to your popularity? Is it your longevity or your personality or—

FW: I think [short pause] I think it's my personality and as pleasant as I am with everyone. I think when I treat people good, they're going to return.

[Male employee approaches Floria, looking for a place at the bar to leave his baseball cap while he's on his shift]

FW: Here you go, baby. [Flora takes his cap and puts it behind the bar.]

EMPLOYEE: Thank you.

FW: Mm-hmm. And as they say about the young people, uh, he wasn't going to leave his hat here. He wants me to hold his hat, but I was busy, and he didn't want to distract [me]. It's just respect. He's a nice young man, but you have some of them that don't have no training. And they—in all races. It's not just one race; it's all races. But, uh, I really—I—I—and I always say, "I can't put my finger on exactly what makes me popular, but I—uh, interesting? That's what my GM calls me, Miss Interesting. [Laughs] And my boss, the one that's--Mr. Joe[seph Fein, III]. You met him.

AE: Did I? I don't know.

FW: The one that got the umbrella from right here? The big guy?

AE: Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FW: Yeah, that's my boss. Uh-huh. Although we have two others that own it [the restaurant]. That's Michelle's father. [Michelle Fein Morantez is the Director of Marketing and Public Relations]

AE: Okay. Okay.

FW: Yeah, I thought I saw you talking to him earlier. And that's why I didn't introduce y'all.

AE: Okay.

FW: Okay.

AE: And I've never met Michelle face to face. We've only had phone conversations.

FW: You haven't?!

AE: No, ma'am.

FW: Well, I—well, she's been trying to get me for three days.

AE: Has she? [Laughs]

FW: I get home, and I'm looking at my phone [taps on bar] ID? And I go, "Court of Two Sisters, and another Court of Two Sisters, Court of Two Sisters". I said, "They knew I was gone, why are they calling?" So I had to call to find out--to see what was going on. So one of the girls in the office, she realized, she said, "Oh, yeah Miss Flo, that was Michelle trying to get you." I say, "What's wrong?" She said she had to tell me about you. I said, "Okay."

AE: It was my fault. [Laughs] They were burning up the phone lines to find you on my behalf!

FW: Yeah! Yes, yes. Well, I'm one of the few people that—besides my niece I found out in Chicago—that takes calls at home about their work. The bartenders can call me anytime from the time they walk in that door till the time I get here or they leave. [Michelle walks by the bar. Flo addresses her.] Michelle?

MICHELLE: Yeah?

FW: Come and see me darling.

AE: [To Michelle] Hi, Michelle. I'm Amy Evans.

MICHELLE: Hi, it's nice to meet you. How's [the interview] going?

AE: Great!

FW: Oh, we're just visiting! But you might could help me out. What makes me popular? Is it my good looks or my personality?

MICHELLE: Both!

FW: Ahhh! [Laughs]

MICHELLE: A combination. I'll be right back.

FW: All right, baby. Thank you.

AE: [To Flo] [Laughs] There you go, that's the answer you needed.

FW: Yes, yes! Oh, boy.

AE: And y'all have—actually, I got Michelle's name from Ann Rogers, who does the cocktail tour—the Southern Comfort cocktail tour.

FW: Yeah, Ann! Yeah, uh-huh.

AE: Does she bring a lot of people through here?

FW: [Nods "yes"] All right.

AE: Yeah? All right, you've got a big group.

[Group of about six or seven people approaches the bar]

FW: [To group] Hello there!

AE: I'll let you go.

FW: [To group] How is everybody?

MALE CUSTOMER: Good!

FW: [To interviewer] You can sit and visit. I don't care.

[The interviewer stays at the bar for a while longer, taking notes about the interview. As soon as Flo is finished serving her new group of customers, the interviewer orders a Sazerac. Interviewer photographs Flo as she makes the drink.]

[END TRACK 4 – COUNTER: 15:01]

[END]