

FRANCIS CHAUVIN
Pie Maker- Hammond, LA
[with Faustina “Tina” Cook]

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Date: November 3, 2005
Location: Mrs. Chauvin’s home – Hammond, LA
Interviewer: Laura Westbrook, University of New Orleans
Length: 56 minutes
Project: Gulf Coast Foodways Renaissance Project/Hurricane Katrina

[Begin Frances Chauvin]

0:00:00.0

Laura Westbrook: Here we go--it's November 3rd and this is an interview with Mrs. Francis Chauvin at her home outside of Hammond, Louisiana. The interviewer is Laura Westbrook, and Frances is making pies this morning with help from Faustina Cook. I'm going to just sit this here until we need to move it.

0:00:18.4

Frances Chauvin: Okay.

0:00:19.1

LW: The first thing I noticed when I come to visit your house, other than how wonderful it smells, is that this house seems to have been created just for you and the things you do. How did this place come to be?

0:00:33.1

FC: Well, I drew up the floor plans the night before we started it.

0:00:36.9

LW: No!

0:00:37.6

FC: We lived in Hammond and we had this land, and the sewage backed up, and we had to move in with seven kids to the Holiday Inn after being on a two-week vacation, and a fellow came and said, "Well, when are ya'll going to start your house?" I said, "Tomorrow!" I drew up the floor plan that night. And we didn't know what the rest would look like; it took us a while to get that. But we had a place for all of our furniture, and all that we had in the other house, so that's how--and no architect, so--and here's a picture of me putting a roof on and all our children helping us--helping. We had carpeting and family and friends did a lot of the work. It was fun.

0:01:23.4

LW: Had you had an idea in your mind already of the ideal house--?

0:01:27.5

FC: Well, we knew we wanted some kind of a barn-looking thing because it was on the farm. We got these beams out of the barn across the street and this big piece of cypress came from a

friend out on Blood River; he gave it to us and we left it in its natural shape and that--that became the bar.

0:01:55.2

LW: Now you say you grew up in--in Welsh, Louisiana?

0:01:57.9

FC: Uh-hm; and went to school in Welsh and Fenton, F-e-n-t-o-n, and my husband was from the Napoleonville.

0:02:05.8

LW: And so your--your husband, what did he teach when you met him?

0:02:09.7

FC: He taught English and History and Algebra; he taught me that.

0:02:15.6

LW: So you had--you had him as your teacher for three classes?

0:02:19.0

FC: Yes, over a period of a year and a half. And he was 10 years older than I, but we had--he got into the radio business after teaching school and that was the most interesting place to raise children.

0:02:37.1

LW: I'll bet it was. And the kids worked there with you?

0:02:39.9

FC: Uh-hm; as they grew up they--they worked for us. And two of the boys are still morning men at the two local radio stations right now.

0:02:51.4

LW: What are the main changes that you've noticed in this region in terms of like community life and that sort of thing from the time you were growing up near here?

0:03:01.6

FC: Well it's always been a cultural place, a lot--like with the college; we have a wonderful college and with--with a wonderful music department and English department and we have Fanfare [arts festival in Hammond] and we get top people down. In fact, Coach Carter, who they made the movie about, is going to be here tonight at 7:30. He was supposed to be here last week and ended up in the hospital—so he will be on stage talking to the kids about achieving more in life and making good grades. The Fanfare is wonderful--it's in the month of October and they have top people--Katherine Stetson; oh they just finished the *Sound of Music*. In fact it's--no it goes through Saturday--the production and they get--they have--every year they have people from New York that come down and they put on plays and they did *Annie* four years ago and my granddaughter was Annie. She has a beautiful voice, Neely Durham, and she had the part of Annie in the production but all the productions are--are top notch. So it's--it's a real good--we have a Hammond Culture Department downtown and we renovated the downtown area, a lot of the places and it's become--.

0:04:26.3

LW: Yes; they've done a very good job with that. Now what about, in terms of culture in the area, that comes from--that's more related to communities rather than things that come from outside? Are there things that were always special to you growing up, local celebrations or that sort of thing?

0:04:46.9

FC: Well see I--I--we moved here when I was about what--about 25 years old, so they have always had a lot of cultural things at the college. Now see all these productions, they're--they're put on from New York but they're local people in the productions.

0:05:04.7

LW: Yes, yes.

0:05:05.5

FC: Uh-hm; yes, so they all--the college has just been a wonderful place to--to live and raise children here.

0:05:17.6

LW: Now, how about holidays and things like that in your family? Do you have special ways-- I mean you certainly, with your pies, make *other* families' holidays special.

0:05:28.2

FC: We are--always had--I mean the whole family; there's 33 in the family now and they always come plus several extra people--boyfriends and girlfriends as the grandchildren get older. We've always had a whole lot of--of people around and we fix a traditional turkey and a lot of

everything--way--way too much food. But--and then of course the pies, but my husband was a very good cook, a very good French cook, and so he would make certain things and I would make other things.

0:06:06.1

LW: What were his specialties?

0:06:08.4

FC: Sauce Piquante, and gumbos, and he could make gravy out of almost nothing, and--and it would be very good.

0:06:16.8

LW: Uh-hm; and what about your specialties?

0:06:17.4

FC: Yes; well I cook roast, rice—rice and gravies—like my grandmother would. John did teach me a lot of the brown gravies and all and I fixed chicken spaghetti but not the Italian way. It's a--a--well it's Frank Davis' recipe--a lot of Frank Davis' recipes that the children have seen or I've seen on television and it's a [*Phone Rings*]--. Can you stop that?

0:06:45.4

LW: Sure.

0:06:46.2

FC: --make pies and I teach them when they're young, but we had a two and a half year old boy last night that's not going to be invited back until he's at least three. [*Laughs*] Oh yes; I hardly ever baby-sit, but both families needed someone last night for a little while, and he got into the flour, and had it everywhere. He said "I'm big now! I'm big now!"

0:07:12.2

LW: [*Laughs*] Now, your dining table seats eighteen. When you were growing up, what was the family like? Were there lots of people around, the way there are now?

0:07:21.7

FC: Yes; my mother was one of thirteen children. And--anyway I had thirty-nine first cousins and every third Sunday was our time to go to--my grandfather was—her [Frances' mother] daddy was an invalid from crippling arthritis, and we would go to the house. We'd go see them in Benton, Louisiana, every third Sunday because there were too many to all go at once, and

they'd cook and we'd wash the dishes in the bathtub, because there were no dishwashers then. Then my daddy's family—he was one of three, but my grandmother's family had double first cousins and had eight children and there were a whole lot of people—so every Sunday we were at someone's house or they were at our house; so. And now Sunday--we always cooked for everybody and they're here unless they're away—the two granddaughters are paying tennis all over the South now. They're thirteen years old, and unless there's a ballgame they go to or something, they're here for Sunday dinner. And if they don't come in at noon and they have someplace to go, they usually come at night and eat.

0:08:29.3

LW: Oh my goodness. Now how did you--when did you first start cooking? You were saying that that two year-old isn't going to be allowed in the kitchen until he gets a little better. When were you allowed in the kitchen?

FC: Oh my grandmother had the patience, and I was the first grandchild, and she taught me how to do this when I was about nine years old. She also taught me to sew. I make everything that I wear--all my clothes. I made all my husband's shirts and the shirts that he has on in the pictures and all--I made his shirts, but the pies--starting with the pies, our--our son, Tim and [his wife] Laurie live across the street. They were on the Downtown Development Board and they wanted to get a market started—something to renovate, I mean to rejuvenate, downtown and they had a few people. Tim said, “Momma, why don't you do something--be a vendor?” I said, “What could I do?” He said, “I don't know; cook something or make some cookies or pies or

something,” so I started making the pies and selling them, and Richard McCarthy and someone else from the market in New Orleans came up and tasted them, and they asked if--they asked me if I would go down there. And my son was already selling flowers down there—Tim Chauvin, and Laurie, have Petal Farms—so I started going there; that was six years ago. So I've been going ever since.

0:10:05.4

LW: What were your first experiences like cooking? Were you an immediate success or did you hit a few bumps along the way?

0:10:12.0

FC: Well I don't know.

0:10:13.9

LW: When you were learning, say, with your grandmother?

0:10:16.5

FC: Oh I--I don't remember anything.

0:10:21.1

LW: Do you remember what the first thing was that they allowed you to start? Did you start with biscuits or--?

0:10:26.0

FC: Yeah; I would make biscuits, but also the pie crusts, and cookies and all and--and my, let's see. Then I started making--learning how to make milk gravy; that's what we made over--over that way. We had rice every meal, because my daddy and grandfather and brothers were all rice farmers and we had a lot of rice, but my grandfather had a truck patch so we had all our fresh vegetables and boiled peanuts and watermelons and all that. So we--we were always used to eating a lot of fresh vegetables.

0:11:05.4

LW: And did you help with regular family meals or just special occasions?

0:11:10.7

FC: No; I didn't. Well I married at eighteen, so I was busy going to school, playing basketball and all but I--I didn't help, but I learned how to make homemade cinnamon rolls too when I was very young and they're so good.

0:11:26.9

LW: Those must have made you very popular. *[Laughs]*

0:11:30.9

FC: Well back then most everybody did things like this. *[aside to Faustina, who is pouring filling into pie shells]* Okay; I need it 'cause it's one and a half measure.

0:11:44.1

LW: When you were growing up was there a place in--in your town that served as sort of the social center of the community?

0:11:52.2

FC: My house!

0:11:53.1

LW: Your house?

0:11:54.2

FC: Well because we lived out in the country and the people were--I was able to drive. I learned to drive when I was about eleven or twelve and I would go pick up people on Sunday evening and bring them back to my house, and we would make hot fudge and all, and dance to records, and so--because there--Fenton was a very, very small place. I think the population was about two hundred, three hundred, so you either went to a ballgame at the gym or someone's house.

0:12:24.7

[Off Mic Conversation]

0:12:25.5

FC: *[offering direction to Faustina]* It's around one and a half--the round ones. So--and then basketball games—we didn't have a football team but we had a basketball team which came out first in the State in 1960 and 1955, and both of my brothers played on it.

0:12:47.2

[Off Mic Conversation]

0:12:47.9

FC: [*aside to Faustina*] Yes; use the round one. Yeah; that's what I measure the butter with; so.

0:13:08.9

LW: Now I have a guess, but what is your favorite thing about making the pies and--and going around and selling them at different farmers markets and places?

0:13:18.1

FC: Because of the repeat customers that--because I make each pie like it would be for my family or best guest and all, and I make one recipe at a time. Let me show you the--what I have already mixed up. I have 12 bowls--in fact Johnny has taken a picture of them--those little clear bowls there and I put them out there, but if you double the recipe--see all the--I can put these--go ahead and mix them up and then I put water and then roll them out; that's what I did this morning, to try to keep ahead on that. But it takes a lot of time to do all that but if you double the recipe the crust does not come out the same. It's tougher.

0:14:06.4

LW: Ah.

0:14:06.6

FC: And see my--my crust--I'm known for my pie crust and anybody--I mean you can put anything in the middle but it's the crust that makes the pie.

0:14:18.2

LW: So the thing that you really enjoy about it, one of the things that you enjoy the most, is kind of getting to know the repeat customers?

0:14:24.6

FC: Oh--oh yes; yes and I miss--especially miss all those that were down in New Orleans--Saturday customers. I was there longer than the Tuesday market. I'd go every other Tuesday and every Saturday.

0:14:37.5

LW: Yeah; what's most challenging about doing this?

0:14:42.7

FC: Hmm; I don't know. [*Laughs*]

0:14:47.6

LW: You're up to it, whatever it is.

0:14:48.8

FC: Yes; I--I just do what's--what I need to do that day.

0:14:55.2

LW: Uh-hm; what about since the storms have hit the Gulf Coast area, have you found that your business has changed already?

0:15:06.0

FC: Oh yes; well, for four or five weeks I didn't bake pies because I had no place to sell them, and then Darlene [Wolnik, with the Crescent City Farmers' Market] called and told me that we could go to the Baton Rouge market and they would let us in there. So I made the trip over and took my friend Lucy Mae with me and we found out that we could both go and we're sharing a table over there. They've been very nice to us and welcoming us and all, so--.

0:15:35.6

LW: So the Crescent City Farmers Market has been looking out for its vendors and trying to help them find new places?

0:15:41.0

FC: Yes; uh-hm, right. They told us to contact them, so our first Saturday was scheduled to be [the weekend we were hit by Hurricane] Rita--I mean Rita's Saturday, so we had to cancel and I had a lot of my pie stuff made, but I can keep my stuff in the cooler for about the week before I bake it. I don't bake until tomorrow because I want the pies to be real fresh.

0:16:05.3

LW: Be just fresh.

0:16:06.7

FC: But I--it takes me a couple days to put them together and I put them in my cooler.

0:16:11.9

LW: Now, what about gathering the ingredients that you need to make the pies? Have you noticed that the availability of your ingredients has changed a little bit up here?

0:16:26.9

FC: No; because right now I'm using the peaches that I put up this summer. That was one thing; I was in Destin, Florida for twelve days and my sons had to go to Baton Rouge to get gas to keep generators going. I had two of the great big chest-type freezers--one full of blueberries, and one full of peaches, and another one full of blueberries and peaches. The peaches came from Chilton County, Alabama and they do sell them at the Crescent City Farmers Market, and the reason he does sell them there is because I was his best peach customer in Hammond. He's been coming to Hammond--he has five varieties of peaches and been coming to Hammond for twenty-three years and he started asking about the market, so now his family goes to New Orleans [to sell at the market] but they're his peaches. And the blueberries are raised by a fellow from Mandeville and he raises them up in Chattawa, Mississippi—Chattawa Farms is the name of it. And he drops the blueberries off at my house on his way home after they're picked fresh, so I use the freshest ingredients. I get Bergeron's pecans who happens to be my son-in-law's cousin and I've been to his home. And anyway you see I have 60 pounds of pecans that were delivered. They deliver them in no time; so--you call one day and you usually get them the next day however with--it's a little slower since the storm getting delivery of that.

0:17:53.4

LW: You have individual connections for your materials--

0:17:57.5

FC: And then my husband did raise cushaws and pumpkins but--now I've been--I've been buying them at the market in Baton Rouge; they have cushaws and pumpkins.

0:18:07.9

LW: Uh-hm; so you sell at the farmers market and you buy there too?

0:18:11.9

FC: Oh yes; I--I do definitely--buy my vegetables for the weekend and I've got--and before the--the market doesn't start 'til 8 o'clock and customers can't buy anything 'til 8:00 but vendors can buy before 8:00 so we always try to go get everything before the market starts.

0:18:36.3

LW: Well that's an interesting thought-- before the farmers market opens the vendors are able to walk around, visit with each other, see what each other has.

0:18:45.1

FC: Right.

0:18:46.6

LW: And then also make--make some purchases?

0:18:48.5

FC: Right; uh-hm, yes; so--. [*Looking for cutlery to lay the table for lunch*]

0:18:55.5

LW: That's what I do too; when I have company I often will forget just that one last thing, or the last fork to put on the table.

0:19:11.0

FC: Yes.

0:19:13.8

LW: So have you been hearing from other cooks that you know, or other people who supply produce, that they're running into problems related to the storms?

0:19:25.6

FC: No; not really because I mean they--I mean the stuff--a lot of it's coming back now.

0:19:38.3

LW: Yeah.

0:19:40.3

FC: Like the Capdebosqs [a family of farmers] in Independence, they--they have flowers and vegetables, but it took about six weeks for, you know, to have a new supply.

0:19:52.9

LW: Yes.

0:19:55.0

FC: So--.

0:20:17.6

LW: Now how long does it take you, from start to finish, to make a batch of pies like the ones you're making now? What time do you start in the morning?

0:20:28.5

FC: Well--let's see; I started these after you got here, yeah. So it--it takes probably about an hour to put this many together and get them ready to put in the cooler. Then I'm having oven problems and it's taking me forever--. [*Frances' eye falls on a framed black and white photo of a smiling young woman in a college basketball uniform that appears to have been taken in the late 1970s*] Robin Roberts--do you know her?

0:22:01.6

LW: Yes; I sure do.

0:22:02.8

FC: She worked for us for four years.

0:22:06.1

LW: Oh, she's a sweet person.

0:22:08.6

FC: Oh she is; let me show you this picture. My son Johnny, the photographer, he and his wife and children went up to *Good Morning America* and he took her a copy of this picture from her days of basketball at Southeastern. Yeah; so they went up a few times with the girls, so I have them here. But last--last year this weekend, I took two big pies and 36 of the small ones up to *Good Morning America* to Sally Ann, I mean to Robin, and to Diane Sawyer. It takes thirty-six people to produce the *Good Morning America* show so I took each one a small pie. And they welcomed me and sat me down, called me Grandma and they put a bench right there where I would be next to Robin.

0:23:02.8

LW: Now, what was your reason for being at *Good Morning America*?

0:23:05.9

FC: Well Neely, the one I said was in the play *Annie*, went up to take a weekend of singing classes and I had another daughter, Janie, who lives in Mandeville. Her fourteen year-old daughter went too, so Janie's other daughter, who was eleven at the time, was a model up in New York two summers ago and we--my husband and I, three summers ago now--my husband and I spent a week up there. Robin Roberts came to see us at the hotel and she calls us her second

family. When she came to see us at that time and after we visited with her for a while she says, "I want you to meet my driver," and John said, "You mean you didn't ride your bicycle to come see me like you always did?" She worked for us for four years and was always on time. She wanted to learn how to do sports-casting and news-casting, so my husband and sons are the ones that taught her how, and when my husband passed away in August a year ago, she called the very next day and said, "If it hadn't been for John Chauvin and the Chauvin family I would not be where I am today." And two months later her dad died unexpectedly and we went to the funeral there. When we got there her mommy said, "Here's Robin's second family." And so I can call her anytime I want to and get a return call within a couple hours or so. So anyway, we were going up there, so I took the pies just to--to go and-- we had tickets for *Good Morning America*; so. And then Johnny, when he was up there, his family were on with her, and Tim across the street, he was there two years ago when Jack was just six months old, and Diane Sawyer held the little girl who is now six, and Robin said--put her arm around Tim and said, "Yeah; he and I used to work for minimum wages together," and then she has called my son Johnny and interviewed him on *Good Morning America*. So when she was inducted to the Sports Hall of Fame at Southeastern and there were over 500 people there and she had a special table--two tables for our family and she recognized each one and said something funny about each one about how they treated and her all; so we're proud of her.

0:25:55.0

LW: That's a special thing, to play such a big part in someone else's life.

0:25:58.1

FC: Yeah; and then Al Nassa that worked for WWL, he worked for us at one time and Ray Romero worked for us from the time he was 14 years old. I forgot when he moved down to New Orleans but he worked for us. We've had a lot of good people come out, you know they were in a town where they could walk from the college to the radio station and have a decent job and--and an enjoyable job too.

0:26:25.7

LW: Yeah; so you've been able to really be part of other people's lives through the radio station and through your [gesturing toward piemaking]--?

0:26:36.8

FC: [*Off Mic Conversation, conferring about pies*]

0:26:44.8

LW: And now you're still part of people's lives through your cooking, but you're--you're kind of there at their Thanksgiving tables and their Christmas tables?

0:26:54.3

FC: Uh-hm; and I go to the Chamber of Commerce events. I go to the football games and you know--anything local.

0:27:04.3

LW: Yeah; so people--you--you know a lot of people in town and they know you?

0:27:07.3

FC: Yes; uh-hm.

0:27:13.6

LW: What do people tell you about what your cooking means to them? You were saying that--that getting to know your steady customers is one of the best things about the job. Why is that?

0:27:26.2

FC: Yeah.

0:27:26.3

LW: What kind of--what do they tell you about it?

0:27:27.8

FC: Oh well they're just so happy that they don't have to have that mess in their kitchen.

[Laughs]

0:27:32.5

LW: **[Laughs]** That's very sentimental.

0:27:36.0

FC: And also they don't know how to do it you know; so I think that's--I mean it's fun--fun being able to be part of that.

0:27:48.1

LW: Uh-hm; and do people come to see you after they've had some special occasion where they've served your food and tell you about it?

0:27:56.8

FC: Oh yes; all the time. I--or yeah; they'll stop by, "Oh I had a blueberry pie last week; it's delicious" or blueberry peach and even--you know they don't--they're not--you can't buy a pie every week and eat it--most people can't. Some of them do though--some do. And some won't try anything but a Granny Smith Apple Pie and Lolis [columnist Lolis Eric Elie] that writes for the *Picayune* wrote about my cushaw pies about--it's right here; I have it framed because they're old-fashioned and--.

0:28:31.0

LW: Yes.

0:28:31.3

FC: It's all--all about them--cushaw pies and he mentions it and I've sold a lot of cushaw pies since that article; so.

0:28:50.7

LW: Do you have any favorite stories that people have shared with you about your--your pies and having them in--as part of their meals?

0:29:02.9

FC: I don't know--I don't know if I can think of anything right now.

0:29:10.4

LW: Oh which kind of pies did you learn how to cook first and how did--?

0:29:14.2

FC: Apple pie was about the only thing I made for many, many years and canned cherry pies, and then when I started making them and started doing--oh blackberry pies I would do--and the dog pulled a cord off--out of the--the freezer was outside in the barn and the dog pulled the cord out and I lost all my blackberries. That was a year ago last summer and last summer I had a hard time finding any, but during the strawberry season I make fresh strawberry pies where I glaze them the night before, but I whip the cream that morning and take them in the ice chest and put them together at the market, and people really enjoy those. But that is a big mess; I'm always glad when that season is over.

0:30:08.9

LW: Now are your strawberry pies topped like the peach pies you're making now or are they open?

0:30:12.3

FC: No, no; they're open and I put homemade whipped cream on top of it and I don't do it 'til I'm at the market because they don't hold up as well. And a lot of people end up buying everything and putting them in--bringing containers and buying the stuff and they put them together at the house. So the cream is already whipped and all but they just don't hold up as well but they're very good tasting.

0:30:37.7

LW: Yes; it's hard to transport a good strawberry pie.

0:30:41.9

FC: Uh-hm; yes and then during the--I just made--made my first mincemeat this weekend but I'll make that through the New Year's and then quit that.

0:30:53.8

LW: [*Watching Frances rolling out pie crusts*] Uh-hm; so you roll out the top of the pie--you don't roll everything out all at the same time?

0:31:04.9

FC: No.

0:31:06.1

LW: You get the pie completely constructed and then...?

0:31:10.5

FC: Well what I'd normally do, and would have had I not been baby-sitting last night, I would have rolled out a whole bunch of tops and a whole bunch of bottoms and I put film in between them. I can do that several days ahead of time and put them in a cooler but I'm just--

0:31:24.6

LW: Right; if you don't have a baby rolling in your flour?

0:31:26.3

FC: [*Laughs*] Yes; anyway granddaughter is a Public Relations person and a Promotion person for North Oaks Hospital here; for 4th of July they ordered sixty Granny Smith Apple Pies and I made so many every day and they took those for the doctors--for a special promotion they were having. Well this next week, they've ordered forty-seven Pumpkin Pies for a Thanksgiving promotion they're having, so I need to get ahead on a lot because I have all my regular pies

besides; so it will--and they're so appreciative of them. And then I have another daughter who lives in Mandeville and she is a pharmaceutical rep and she takes pies to the doctors' offices that she calls on a lot of times especially if she's low on [dish clatters] and they're so happy to get those instead of donuts and stuff that a lot of people bring you know to get in the door. And they really appreciate that.

0:32:36.9

LW: Now, how would you be able to manage an extra large request like that if the farmers' market was still going on normally? Would you be able to do both?

0:32:49.1

FC: Well I'm--I'm busier in Baton Rouge than I was New Orleans; so yes, I mean just trying to get everybody to pitch in. Like the Sunday before Thanksgiving all my family comes--they come out and help and like some of the grandchildren will put—*[marking the tops of the pies]* see you put a P or a B or something--whatever it is, and then you need the air holes so--anyway they-- even the little ones can do things like that. And they all help--pitch in and help on that Sunday before and Tina {Faustina Cook} and her sister-in-law come about six o'clock that morning and they stay 'til about nine o'clock that night and it takes all that. We have the orders and we put all the orders and the kinds of pies with the telephone number and all on the thing, so we can call the people in case we're afraid they won't show up, and every now and then there's someone that doesn't show up, but I do request that they pay in advance because of that.

0:33:55.6

LW: I imagine very few pies go wanting--.

0:33:57.4

FC: No.

0:34:00.6

LW: Now what is a day like that like with all those people? Do you set up an assembly line or are there certain people who are better than others in your family at helping?

0:34:09.8

FC: Well, the ones that happen not be busy or anything and can do it, but they all just stay so busy right now. But my son, the one that is already here--he went down with me last year and we set up an extra table. We tried to get there early enough and put everybody's names in alphabetical order, so someone might have an order for five pies, and someone for two, and I'll just try to get it as organized as possible before, and then as people are in line they'll leave and a lot of people coming and wanting pies and I do have extra pies, too. But I don't know what I'll be doing for this time--I'm not sure.

0:34:56.5

LW: The only scene that I've seen like that--like the one you describe is the ladies before St. Joseph's Day all baking in the big kitchen. I've been lucky to help in preparing a few of the altars.

0:35:13.1

FC: Well, if you ever get a chance Miss Lucy Mack is one you have to go see.

0:35:16.1

LW: Oh yes?

0:35:16.6

FC: You would enjoy interviewing her because she is the Queen of the Altars. I mean she helps all over with all--and her house burned three or four years ago and that day children were coming to her house for a tour of the strawberry farm. She would charge, I think, two dollars a child but you would get two boxes of strawberries to take back and she had lemonade for them and all--and probably Italian cookies for them. And anyway her house burned almost completely and she went to town and got people to donate stuff and still had those kids out on the day that--with the

fire--and now she lives in a home right there at the same place. She has a nice new kitchen which is really nice because it's very well used. But I didn't have to buy anything to go into the pie business. After we moved out here, I always had a commercial stove and I did buy a cooler that I probably wouldn't have bought but--.

0:36:22.2

LW: So before moving here, just for cooking for your own family and for the large gatherings you have, you had a commercial stove and you've got several commercial refrigerators, too.

0:36:33.1

FC: Yes; I have a sub-zero and a cooler and then I have five freezers.

0:36:40.4

LW: Most of those were just for cooking for your own family?

0:36:43.9

FC: Well I always had four--three freezers and a refrigerator when I had started the pies.

0:36:54.9

LW: Yes?

0:36:55.3

FC: The cooler and another freezer is what I've added, but we always had the big pots and the big bowls and all that before.

0:37:02.6

LW: What have been in your cooking for your family--what have been some of the most requested recipes from your kids and relatives?

0:37:11.8

FC: Green rice dressing that I make; in fact Paulette that works for the *Picayune* had my recipe--I might have a copy of it in there; I'll look later on--and green rice dressing and then dirty rice--and then jambalaya and then--Frank Davis' spaghetti recipe with chicken and a lot of garlic and a lot of green onions and a lot of mushrooms and then milk gravy venison and any kind of venison--game--oh ducks; that's their favorites. They like game and they don't--don't want anything--wine or anything added or marinade or anything; they like it natural.

0:38:05.6

LW: Now where have you been able to find game? Is it hunted locally--?

0:38:09.6

FC: Oh, well, my daddy furnished us. In fact my grandson has a trailer back there; he's getting ready to move that. Daddy passed away but we still have the rice farm and they--duck hunting has always been good there. It's better there, especially this year because it's away from the water. It's up north of Interstate 10, so--and then daddy always furnished us with a lot of fish, red snapper, perch, and all. Mom and Daddy hunted and fished a whole lot; they started--they would hunt in Alaska then come to Wyoming and then Colorado and then West Texas and always end up on the Atchafalaya River where my diapers froze when I was four months old right up at Whiskey Bay. **[Laughs]** And the--the family still has--I mean they still hunt there.

0:39:08.7

LW: Now clearly you did not--you weren't able to tell your parents that your--that your diapers were freezing. How did that happen?

0:39:16.4

FC: [*Laughs*] My daddy always enjoyed telling that to everybody. That was unusual to be that cold in deer season--well probably--it was probably January. Christmas Day after we ate dinner we would always pile in the car and go to the camp afterwards.

0:39:39.9

LW: Hmm; that's an unusual tradition. I've not heard that very often; is that something that other families did as well?

0:39:47.8

FC: Oh yes; they still do it. Oh they--

0:39:52.5

LW: And what was that like? What was Christmas Day like?

0:39:55.0

FC: Oh well we had a big dinner and all but afterwards we'd get--go and--it was on 190 that we would--we would go in Krotz Springs and--and sleep in the tent that night. We loved camping. In fact our children grew up camping. We would take three-week vacations out west and had tents at first and then one--a pop-up camper and then we bought a 35-foot Greyhound bus that was a

camper and then we bought a 40-foot Trailways bus that was a camper, so we camped all over the United States and Nova Scotia and down in Mexico and we'd take our kids and we'd drive overnight to Vail with about sixteen people in our bus and then find a place--I mean stay in a motel over there and go skiing and--. I went skiing last year at Park City and skied. Seventeen in our family went.

0:41:05.9

LW: Oh my. Well, there was a story in the *Times Picayune* this morning in the "Living" section about families that take trips together and, particularly in this case, families that evacuate together, and the little teaser headline that was on the front page to get you to turn to that article said something like "Is Your Family Close?," and then in smaller print it said, "Try Evacuating With Them." It was about a family that had evacuated with, I think, 47 family members.

0:41:44.5

FC: Oh my--oh my goodness; that would be a lot.

0:41:47.3

LW: I think your family could pull that off.

0:41:51.5

FC: My daughter--youngest daughter gave me a Christmas present, a picture of a trip--let's see-- last year—those trips are the best memories of my life . . . [*Emotional*]

0:42:15.9

LW: Uh-hm; all those trips your family took?

0:42:20.0

FC: Yeah; with her daddy.

0:42:23.2

LW: Yes; now did he ski?

0:42:28.5

FC: No; he wouldn't ski.

0:42:29.7

LW: What was he like on family vacations?

0:42:31.0

FC: Oh a lot of fun; I mean he--oh he loved to have a good time, loved to have his wine and drinks but--and he did a lot of cooking and I did most of the--most of the driving all my life; he didn't like to drive ; rough the cities and all but he--he was a lot of fun. When he realized that--well he had cancer. He had--had it four years before and oh penile cancer which is very rare and anyway they thought--Dr. Oschner thought he had gotten it all; of course with cancer you never know and then last--it was oh before Thanksgiving last year, I had--Tina--[*calls to Faustina Cook*]
—go get that picture of us on the cruise. [*Tina brings photograph*] It was two years ago Thanksgiving after we ate dinner he said, “Well I won't be here next year.” He says, “I want to go on a cruise.” That was Thanksgiving Day. Well the next day, my daughter in Mandeville had gotten on the internet and found a good cruise and ten of us had signed up for the cruise the very next day. We went on that and we left the day of the LSU [game]--I mean New Year's Day or the day before. Well we watched the ballgame on the cruise ship. And we had some real devout LSU fans in the family. But anyway we did that and then, let's see--this--this is all of us on the--on that cruise ship, see. This is the one that's expecting; she's thirty-seven and this is my oldest daughter and her husband and that's my youngest daughter and that's the one--Janie, she's a character. That's the one who--.

0:44:47.1

LW: What a beautiful family.

0:44:48.3

FC: But anyway--anyway John had a scooter--electric scooter he bought about five or six years ago and--so he took that on the cruise ship and he was able to go all over. He had heart problems, so he couldn't walk that far but--but then when he decided that--when he knew that he didn't have a lot of time left, but he was still getting around pretty good and all, he came in and he says, "I've decided I want to be cremated." He says "Tell Tim to come in," he wanted someone else to hear that he said that. He talked about it before and my oldest son Johnny had told us it would be ridiculous to buy a big, I mean expensive, casket and John didn't like going to the funeral home for anybody at all anyway. Anyway he said, "I want to be cremated and my ashes spread here," and he said, "I guess ya'll want a big party." And we said, "We sure do." Over 500 people came, and the Sheriff's Department sent out three sheriffs to park their cars. Even if it rains you can park all over the yard there. Gary Blossman is a good friend of the family and he sent over an Abita Beer truck and the bar in town came out and we had so much food, we had to give food away. We had, I think, about fifteen hams and I don't know how many turkeys, stuffing--all kinds of food and it was supposed to be from 6:00 to 9:00 and it lasted 'til midnight. And my granddaughter that sings sang *On April's Wings* and another friend who has a beautiful voice and he sang *Amazing Grace* and all, and Father--we have a good friend who is a priest and he's gone on a lot of trips with us; he's married our children and christened the grandkids and when we called and told him that John's blood pressure had dropped--he lives in Memphis--he's a priest up there, he was down within seven hours and he stayed a whole week. He went back because he had another friend up in Wisconsin that was sick and he was on

vacation so he went up there and we had to call him and tell him John passed away. He came down and spent another week with us and he--they planned all the service and it really wasn't sad.

0:47:14.9

LW: It sounds as though it's just the kind of service he would have loved.

0:47:18.6

FC: Oh yes; don't you think Tina?

TC: Yes, it really was nice.

FC: It was August 13th he died and I think three days later is when we had the service on a Monday and it was a cool weekend, a lot of cool days so the kids had plenty time to do the yard work and get everything in real--when we have a party here we do get it real cleaned up and anyway so it was a real, real nice event. And he had good write-ups in the *Times Picayune* and *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* and several other papers in Southwest Louisiana. **[Off Mic Conversation]** You go ahead and eat. She doesn't have good lungs; she has a lung problem, so she needs to sit down. **[Off Mic Conversation]** Oh you want me to--okay.

0:48:37.0

LW: Now Tina, how long have you been a cook? Have you been cooking all your life too?

0:48:40.8

Tina: Oh yeah; but I've been helping her for four and a half years.

0:48:43.8

LW: Uh-huh; what about your own cooking? What are your favorite things to do?

0:48:48.1

Tina: Just everyday foods I guess.

0:48:51.2

LW: Did you learn from your mom?

0:48:52.5

Tina: Yeah; I learned and I have five children, so it was more--more--.

0:48:59.9

FC: More pickles.

0:49:00.9

Tina: That's all I have.

0:49:00.9

FC: Oh that's all you have--okay.

0:49:02.0

Tina: That's all I have.

0:49:03.1

FC: You looked; I don't have any over there huh?

0:49:04.6

Tina: No, ma'am I looked; you got pickles but they're dill.

0:49:06.6

FC: Oh no; I don't want dill--okay. All right.

0:49:09.8

Tina: No; I raised five children--I've got four girls and a boy and momma always cooked--we were seven children back then--five boys and two girls and mom and dad, so it was nine altogether, so it was like Miss Frances, you had to cook. I cooked beans and--

0:49:23.6

FC: Oh it's hard to cook for two people or one.

0:49:26.0

Tina: Oh it is; it's hard to cook for one person. I freeze but I had to have my beans and my rice and my kids loved it and stew and potato salad is one of their favorites and spaghetti salad. They love the spaghetti salad. They don't like the peppers in it.

0:49:41.3

FC: I make a spaghetti salad; that's very popular and make it for big parties with just mayonnaise and highly seasoned mayonnaise with a lot of garlic--Hellmann's mayonnaise with tomatoes, fresh tomatoes and fresh bell peppers and you put a little bit of mustard in it and a lot of lemon--I use lemon pepper and garlic salt in everything I cook.

0:50:03.9

Tina: And just--and grits for breakfast and biscuits--plenty of biscuits and cornbread. It was so hard when my family dwindled down and then when I got by myself with just the three little kids--we had two married before we divorced and it was hard. And then when I got by myself cooking, (sigh)--I still cook though. I've got--a friend of mine gave me some greens; he called me over and said they had some greens. I went over and--Tuesday afternoon, Freddie, you know my friends that used to have the store--and they was so pretty. We picked them--his girlfriend and I-- we picked them and enjoyed talking to each other 'cause I knew her and I cooked those yesterday and, you talk about good.

0:50:48.5

FC: Lucy gave me those fresh ones the other day at the market and cooked them that Sunday and they were so good.

0:50:53.3

Tina: And my whole house smelled like green onions and--'cause you've got green onion--fresh green--and greens, so yesterday afternoon--I cooked them yesterday morning and I had run to town and back. Opened that door and that's the first thing I smelled was greens and green onions but oh it smelled good. It's just a lot--my children ate a lot of vegetables. I like vegetables. I cook meat but I prefer vegetables. I'm not a meat eater.

0:51:18.6

FC: Well the things that you cooked for your family when your children were small, were they the same foods that your mother made when you and your siblings were small?

0:51:27.6

Tina: Most of them, but we had more meat and we had--momma had pork because we raised our pork but then my husband, his parents raised beef along with their, you know, cattle; they has a dairy farm. I was raised right up the road on a dairy farm, and he was raised on the other end of this big road over here where I'm living now on a dairy farm, but we didn't eat that much meat because we had chicken and I don't like chicken now.

0:51:55.7

LW: [*Laughs*] You had too much of it growing up?

0:51:57.9

Tina: I think so. But I can still--I mean up 'til the last few years I haven't--but I used to. We used to raise chickens and I'd clean them. We did it at home; we killed our own and my children and I--.

0:52:11.0

FC: We did too.

0:52:14.0

Tina: My children have cleaned a many of them but we didn't wring their necks. Momma never believed in wringing the neck. She said you're supposed to let the blood out of any animal before you eat it. She said, "The Bible says tha,"t which it does. **[Laughs]** So she always chopped the head off but she was raised that way too and daddy--my daddy was too; they was raised that way. So the children and I a lot of time--I have a friend--cousin that had a chicken farm and the roosters they couldn't keep so he'd let them get pretty big and then he'd give them to us and we'd cut the heads off and skulled them and picked them.

0:52:50.0

FC: You know I did many of that and many of ducks I did too.

0:52:52.1

Tina: Me--me and momma did some ducks but that--momma kind of burned out on that. She said, "That's too much work for the duck," because you had so many pin feathers in ducks.

0:53:00.5

FC: I love it; it's my favorite food.

0:53:02.4

Tina: She didn't--that wasn't her favorite thing to do. I think she did it a lot at home 'cause they had ducks and geese when she was a child.

0:53:10.3

LW: And they would just pick them off by hand, the--the pin feathers?

0:53:11.8

Tina: Yeah; to pull them out. You singe them but that won't take the pin feathers out. You get--that gets the little fuzz off of the chicken, but my kids grew tired of that too.

0:53:25.6

LW: [*Laughs*] That's too much work.

0:53:27.8

Tina: They didn't like the smell of it. I mean when you're used to it, it doesn't bother you, but the girls didn't care too much for it. Now the boy did; I just had the one by but--of course he was smaller than the two other girls so he didn't get to help too much. They'd pick--all the kids would pick feathers.

0:53:44.2

LW: Uh-hm; and that would decrease their appetite for the duck--?

0:53:45.7

Tina: No.

0:53:46.6

LW: No?

0:53:47.7

Tina: No; it didn't them. Momma just didn't like and I just didn't like it. But I haven't made chicken--I guess I was ten--twelve years old the last time I ate fried chicken.

0:53:56.8

FC: See, she comes on Monday, Thursday, and Friday and I'll usually--on Sunday I--we have chicken very often and she's out of luck. Sometimes she'll eat some gravy though.

0:54:04.1

Tina: Well it depends on--now if her--if it's seasoned like she seasons it and it sits but she makes it chicken spaghetti. Now if it's season real well and the little pieces of breast meat--is what she makes it out of--it--the seasonings go through that and I can eat some of that because it doesn't taste like chicken or smell like chicken. But I just don't like--but--the day that something is going bad they get me to smell the chicken because I know--they know I know. **[Laughs]** Laurie come across the street last week; she said, "Tina I want you to smell this chicken. It don't smell just right to me." I took one whiff and I said, "It's not good." But that part--it don't bother me though.

0:54:42.9

FC: My brother came over--eight people came over from Southwest Louisiana for Rita and they went to Wal-Mart and bought some chicken and anyway--no it was the Albertson's I think--.

0:54:55.1

Tina: Yeah; it was Albertson's.

0:54:57.1

FC: And anyway we got ready to cook it the next morning and she said it wasn't any good and he said it wasn't--I thought maybe--.

0:55:02.6

Tina: Well he said it was--and he sent for me across the road. I was cleaning over there, me and the sister-in-law for Laurie 'cause she had just had the baby. And Miss Frances had us over there cleaning, so he sent for me to come over here to smell it.

0:55:15.5

FC: So anyway I--I took it back to Albertson's about four days later. I put it in a Ziploc bag you know because I didn't have time to take it before and they--they gave me my money back.

0:55:27.2

Tina: That's what I told her; I said, "You still got the papers; take that back."

0:55:32.9

FC: Well I didn't have a ticket or anything and they took it back.

0:55:34.5

Tina: That's what I told her--I said, "Take that meat back. That's too much," because she had two packs.

0:55:40.4

LW: You're like the--the employee at the winery that they call "the nose." [*Laughs*]

0:55:45.0

FC: Uh-hm. [*Laughs*]

0:55:44.8

Tina: [*Laughs*] Really? Well I guess that's what I am; I can smell things when they don't.

0:55:52.0

FC: Yeah; my--our youngest daughter--they're getting ready to go to California to the winery for Parish National Bank--having--.

0:56:02.2

Tina: That's right; you did say that.

0:56:04.3

FC: Well they've--they've been before. They caught the show over there.

0:56:12.6

Tina: Well there's tuna fish in here if you want a tuna fish sandwich.

0:56:14.7

FC: Yeah; well, we've got a tuna fish sandwich. When I finish putting--sprinkling the sugar on-- it takes me a little longer when you're busy talking.

0:56:24.6

LW: Well, I think I'm going to turn the recording off and help you.

[End Frances Chauvin]