

J. B. Mance
Bully's Restaurant – Jackson, MS

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Date: April 11, 2014
Location: Bully's Restaurant, Jackson, MS
Interviewer: Mary Beth Lasseter
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 12 minutes
Project: Bully's Restaurant

[Begin JB Mance Interview]

00:00:03

Mary Beth Lasseter: Today is Friday, April 11, 2014 and this is Mary Beth Lasseter for the Southern Foodways Alliance at Bully's Restaurant. Could you please state your name and your date of birth and tell me what you do for a living?

00:00:17

JB Mance: My name is J. B. Mance. My birthday is September 26, 1927. And I'm retired; I just go around and give blessing and thanks to the Lord. *[Laughs]*

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MBL: What did you do before you were retired?

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JBM: Well we used to sing quartet. We went all over the country, the Spiritual Clouds of Joy, just singing from city to city, to place to place and we just enjoyed it and it was—it was just a wonderful life to live. But after we reached a certain age we just decided we'd just you know just take it easy.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about the group.

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JBM: Well we—we been off the road about twelve years but we had a chance to do a lot of traveling and we had a chance to do a lot of singing, meet a lot of people. We did a lot of songs *Face-To-Face* and *Don't Trust a Snake* and *Don't Be Worry, Be Happy*—just a lot of songs we used to do and just enjoyed being with the people. But we all you know retiring age so all of the fellas are just sitting back and taking it easy now.

00:01:19

MBL: How many people were in the group?

00:01:22

JBM: There was about seven. There was about seven.

00:01:25

MBL: And what sorts of songs would you sing?

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JBM: Well those were some of the songs we sang—*Hold On*; *Don't Trust a Snake*; *On the Battlefield*; *Don't Worry, Be Happy*; *Going On with Jesus Just the Same*—just a variety of songs.

00:01:39

MBL: Now how did you come to know Bully's Restaurant?

00:01:42

JBM: Well when he was a little kid his mother and father was on this corner and we used to stop by here at eat with them. And we're talking about something about thirty-five years ago. And so we just stayed in touch with him now and he have me on the radio advertising his business every Monday night.

00:02:00

MBL: What radio station does he have you on?

00:02:03

JBM: WMPR.

[Interviewer's note: WMPR is a Jackson radio station owned and operated by Charles Evers, brother of civil rights activist Medgar Evers. It labels itself *The Voice of the Community* and plays blues, gospel, jazz, and R&B, and also hosts several talk radio programs.]

00:02:07

MBL: And how do you advertise it?

00:02:08

JBM: Well we just get on there and talk and tell the peoples what he got because you know what he's serving and what time he opens and what time he closes and how he—how well he you know treats people just—whatever we can say kind about him that's what we do.

00:02:23

MBL: What's the name of the radio program?

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JBM: The J. B. Mance Radio Program.

00:02:30

MBL: Tell me a little bit about what you like to eat here.

00:02:36

JBM: I like ham hocks, fried chicken, cheese macaroni; I love it all, just—just—it's good food.

00:02:46

MBL: How many times a week do you eat here?

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JBM: Six days a week, twice a day.

00:02:54

MBL: That's a lot of macaroni.

00:02:56

JBM: Yeah; it is but after my wife passed they just—they told me they said don't worry about cooking. Just come up here and sit and eat with us, so it was a blessing so that's what I do and thankful to have them to do that.

00:03:09

MBL: And do you always sit at this table space right under your picture?

00:03:13

JBM: I usually sit over there but somebody beat me to that but I sat here today.

00:03:17

MBL: What do you like most about the restaurant?

00:03:22

JBM: Kind peoples, good food; it's a clean place. He [**Mr. Bully**] just is a kind man to be with and he's so grateful to folks and tell you thank you for coming and thank you for staying. He makes sure that you get your good service and then he invites you back.

00:03:39

MBL: Now did you grow up in this neighborhood?

00:03:43

JBM: Well I been in this city since 1939.

00:03:49

MBL: Close to the restaurant?

00:03:51r

JBM: Oh about four blocks across town.

00:03:55

MBL: What have you seen in this neighborhood that has changed over the years?

00:04:01

JBM: Well just mostly buildings go up because when I was running around here eleven years old it wasn't nothing here but trees and just one little street down here. But so many things have been added to the neighborhood since—since '39.

00:04:17

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

00:04:25

JBM: Well they was a large family. My mother was from the Beal side and my father was from the Mance side and my father, he passed at the age of seventy-one. My mother she lived to be 105. And I took her to the studio with me when she was 103 years old and she recorded a song

with me. I plays it on the radio so often right now. She lived to be 105 years old. She been gone about sixteen years now.

00:04:53

MBL: What song did you record with her?

00:04:57

JBM: I had her lead a song; I done forgot what it was. *I'm Blessed*, something like that; it been so long now I done forgot what it was. [*Laughs*] But she—she sang a song on one of my CDs.

00:05:09

MBL: Now what kind of food did your mama cook for you at home?

00:05:12

JBM: Oh turnip greens, collard greens, candied yams, black-eyed peas, potatoes you know like in the olden days, just good old country food. We used to raise it in the garden. She'd grow it and she'd cook it and feed us.

00:05:29

MBL: And does Bully's cook food that's close to what hers tasted like?

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JBM: It tastes very much like it. It reminds me a whole lot when I get here and get—sit down and get—get on those ham hocks and pig feet, it reminds me back when mom used to cook for us.

00:05:45

MBL: Are there any customers who come in here as often as you do?

00:05:52

JBM: I see some come here almost as often as I do but it's hard to come as often as I do because I'm here every day all day just about, since I don't have a cook. But we have a lot of peoples come here every day. A lot of them come with me and come looking for me and just sit with me, but it's—you know this is a nice clean place to come and sit and have food.

00:06:15

MBL: Now do you drive yourself here or do you walk?

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JBM: I drive; I drive myself, yes, uh-hm.

00:06:21

MBL: What are some of the most memorable customers you've had in your company here?

00:06:29

JBM: Oh we've had so many members of my church come here, my pastor, Pastor P. J. Williams and he brings his family and just so many people in the neighborhood, they just say, "You going to Bully's? Let me ride with you." **[Laughs]** So you know that's—that's—it's a pleasure that they do that. They keep him in business and he's proud of it.

00:06:47

MBL: Do you see any other restaurants in the area that serve as a community gathering space like this one?

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JBM: Well there are others here but since I don't go to them I won't go into that too far because I don't want to hurt anybody. **[Laughs]**

00:07:05

MBL: I understand. Can you tell me a little bit about the people who work here besides Mr. Bully?

00:07:13

JBM: You know Miss Jackie, you know she been here I reckon thirty-some years and the rest of the ladies they're here—I don't even know their name, but when I come in they say—they call me Uncle J and they just come and wait on me and they give me such good service. So I eat; I get up and get on about my business. **[Laughs]**

00:07:33

MBL: Is there anything about this restaurant you think that sets it apart from other places in Jackson?

00:07:40

JBM: Yeah; having such a wonderful manager and such a wonderful owner. He's so kind. He makes you feel so welcome. And it's hard to insult him; you know what I mean he takes a whole lot before he insults his customers. He goes out of the way to please you and to me that's a great honor.

00:07:57

MBL: Tell me what you had for lunch today.

00:07:59

JBM: Well I had baked chicken, some—let me see what I had—string beans, candied yams. Just—that's just what I—I don't eat a whole lot; twice a day that's a lot of food to eat. **[Laughs]**

00:08:16

MBL: So you come in and you eat lunch and then you just spend the afternoon and grab supper?

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JBM: Come in about 11:00 every day. He opens every morning at 11:00. I come in at 11:00 and I come back again between 3:00 and 5:00 every afternoon.

00:08:31

MBL: So you make two trips?

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JBM: Two trips a day. Six days a week.

00:08:36

MBL: What do you do on the seventh day?

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JBM: Well I goes to other places and sometimes I have my—I get up and cook at home myself—Sundays.

00:08:49

MBL: Can you maybe sing me a little something?

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JBM: Me sing a little something?

00:08:54

MBL: Yeah.

00:08:55

JBM: I ain't got no voice to sing. I hadn't sing in so long I'd ruin your show if I sang. *[Laughs]*
Just let me keep talking.

00:09:04

MBL: Well when you sang did you have a favorite song?

00:09:07

JBM: Oh, I don't know; I had so many. Like back living up there I used to sing everywhere I go
*You Can't Trust a Snake—the weather was cold, the ground was wet. The man picked up a snake
and took him home for a pet. You know and then we used to sing I'm going to hold on; I'm on
the battlefield—I had so many songs we'd sing. People would buy my records and take pictures
and keep us—you know we went all over the country you know—Chicago, Milwaukee,
California. We went there; sometimes we'd be gone two weeks sometimes. But we're blessed to
be here now.*

00:09:43

MBL: When you recorded your records where were you recording them?

00:09:46

JBM: Well Bennett's Studio and Malaco Studio; we recorded in several studios in the city of Jackson.

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MBL: Now have you ever been here when they've held political meetings in the restaurant or other groups have come in and can you tell me a little bit about that?

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JBM: Well we have other groups to come in but most time they—they be pretty well prepared for who they bring in and we never interfere. Now if we're invited we'll sit in but most time they come here by themselves.

00:10:21

MBL: Tell me a little bit about Jackie and how you know her.

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JBM: Oh it ain't but one Jackie. She's such a lovely lady. She just—she just makes you love her—she come in that door—when you come in that door she got a smile. She going to come and hug you and she'll just make you feel so welcome when you come here. She's such a lovely lady.

00:10:42

MBL: Do you have anything about this restaurant that you would like to tell me that I haven't thought to ask?

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JBM: Just when you get hungry come here. They open at 11:00 a.m. and close about 6:30 and somebody is going to meet you at the door and make you welcome and they're going to take care of you and make sure you'll be seating or if you's in a hurry you dial their phone number. We give it out every Monday night and you get that number and you put it—keep it and when you walk in the door and say I want to pick up my food I just called in and you're ready to go.

00:11:16

MBL: Please tell me again the name of your radio show and what time and what station it airs.

00:11:22

JBM: WMPR, the name of the show is J. B. Mance Show—M-a-n-c-e—Mance and I'm on every Monday night at 8:30. It comes on at 8:30.

00:11:33

MBL: All right. Well thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate talking to you.

00:11:39

JBM: Thank you ma'am; thank you so kindly.

00:11:44

[End JB Mance Interview]