

JANIS JORDAN
Bully's Restaurant – Jackson, MS

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Location: Bully's Restaurant, Jackson, MS
Interviewer: Mary Beth Lasseter
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Project: Bully's Restaurant

[Begin Janis Jordan Interview]

00:00:03

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

00:00:18

Janis Jordan: Janis Jordan, November 6, 1967; I'm a professional soap maker and also sing and perform, and also web development and applications development.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about your family.

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JJ: I'm sixth in a family of seven, four boys, three girls. My mom and dad—my mother married my father when she was thirteen. They've been married over sixty-seven years. And they just recently were placed in a nursing home. They were staying with me for a while. But as a whole, our family, everyone is still here, all my brothers and sisters and my mom and dad.

00:01:00

MBL: And does the family live in Jackson or do they still live where you're from?

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JJ: They still live where I'm from which is Newton, Mississippi. I have one sister in Dallas.

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MBL: Do you have any children of your own?

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JJ: I do, one daughter; she is a senior at USM—very proud of her; she is my purpose here on earth. I love and adore my daughter. She's a senior and hopefully she'll be graduating very soon, Carla.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about how you found Bully's Restaurant.

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JJ: Initially I was introduced to Bully's through a friend, who brought me here and said I would just love the food and that's been probably twenty years ago. And I've been coming ever since, probably two or three times a month, all during this time.

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MBL: Do you live around here or do you travel far to get to Bully's?

00:02:01

JJ: I actually live in North Jackson so it's a bit of a—it's a bit of a drive, not too far though. It's still local.

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MBL: Besides being a diner here tell me about your involvement with the restaurant on Fridays.

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JJ: I've been performing here on Fridays for a while. I enjoy it.

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MBL: What do you do on Friday afternoons, the hours, the music?

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JJ: I'm here on Fridays during the lunch hour and I'm usually here 'til four or five o'clock. I do all types of music. I grew up listening to all types of music from Patsy Cline to Luther Vandross. So—Aretha Franklin and all of those, so I sing a variety of music and there's a variety of people here, so it gives me an opportunity to grow and learn and adjust to the different crowds that are—that are here and meet and mingle with all types of people. It's a tough crowd, so it's taught me to be a much better performer than when I started. **[Laughs]**

00:03:12

MBL: In what ways is it a tough crowd?

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JJ: Well [*Laughs*] if they don't like it they're going to tell you that they don't like it. They're very honest. So far I haven't had that so, um, I feel tremendously blessed. I've been welcomed—everything that I sing from Patsy Cline to the Luther Vandross. It's been received well so I have no complaints about that.

00:03:38

MBL: Do you see that you're drawing in a steady crowd on Friday afternoons? Do you see repeat faces at your shows?

00:03:47

JJ: I do. I see a lot of repeat faces each time I come and there's always new. There's always the newcomers. But mostly yes; I've seen a lot of—I have begun to recognize or ask for certain songs, so that's a plus.

00:04:05

MBL: Whose idea was it for you to begin performing here?

00:04:08

JJ: It was mine. I think I first introduced—when I told him that I performed he was like come on down and so I’ve been coming ever since.

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MBL: Now when you say him you’re referring to?

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JJ: Mr. Bully, Tyrone.

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MBL: Do you bring instruments when you play?

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JJ: I do, a guitar—just a guitar.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about the food here.

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JJ: Oh my goodness. The food is amazing. Mr. Bully cooks [*Laughs*], I mean you just would have to try it. I haven’t had anything here that I did not like. If you grew up eating soul food it actually is a big challenge to your grandmother’s or your mother’s cooking. It’s just amazing. I

find myself having to just [*Laughs*] almost put a—put a chain and lock around my mouth to keep from eating everything. So it—the food is absolutely amazing. You just have to try it; yes.

00:05:13

MBL: What are—what are your—some of your favorite items on the menu?

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JJ: All my health friends are going to get me for this one because I'm very health conscious and I'm always fussing at people and making them do herbs and salads, so [*Laughs*]—so I'm actually cheating when I'm here. But my favorite foods is almost all of it. I eat—I absolutely love the turkey necks which a lot of people would probably say ah, but I love the turkey necks, squash, rutabagas, greens, just I think I've tried everything and it's just all very good. It's very good; I enjoy it very much.

00:06:02

MBL: What did you have for lunch today?

00:06:04

JJ: I had [*Laughs*]—I had the—please forgive me if any of my friends hear this [*Laughs*]—I had the turkey necks, the squash, and the cornbread, but I was only going to have—and she's my witness [**points to interviewer**]—I was only going to have the squash and the cornbread but Jackie forced the turkey necks on me so I didn't have any choice but to get those. So I had squash, turkey necks, and cornbread and lemonade.

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MBL: Now do you perform elsewhere in Jackson?

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JJ: I do. I do some other shows. And I’m also at the Mississippi Farmers’ Market from time to time.

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MBL: Are your other shows at eating establishments as well?

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JJ: Bar and grill type and then the other is the Farmers’ Market and then I also do—perform at different churches.

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MBL: How does the food at Bully’s compare to the food you grew up eating?

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JJ: No reflection on my mother and grandmother but this is actually [*Laughs*] much better. It’s much better. It’s just down home soul food; it’s what I grew up eating just on a whole other level. Of course we had a garden growing up and my mom’s seasoning was not quite the same as you know—so it’s just different flavors and different tastes—same foods. It just tastes totally

different. It's very well-seasoned and the flavoring is just very good. So it is the same food it's just different—the different cook I think is what makes the difference. Very good, very good.

00:08:00

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about the gentleman, I just interviewed that you pointed out? He comes to hear you every Friday?

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JJ: Well he's—he was coming in long before I started playing. I've seen him here a few times, but he's also a performer and so I have a lot of respect for this opinion. I pointed him out because I had just finished performing and I wanted to get an approval from him as to whether or not it was any good or not because if he said it was okay then I know I did pretty good. He's been performing all of his life; he's a gospel singer, guitar. He played the guitar one time while I was here, played my guitar, so I have so much respect for him and I look up to him as a performer and I'm always asking him for pointers. So that's one of the reasons why—why I was pointing him out.

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MBL: As I look at this wall of performers who have been here and visited, have you met any of these people?

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JJ: Yes quite a few; quite a few.

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MBL: Can you tell me which ones or maybe recall the setting?

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JJ: Oh goodness. I've met Mr. John Haley here; I've met H-Town; definitely have met oh goodness, Mr. Blues Man—just so many I can't—I can't um—Pat Brown. I can't recall them all.

[Laughs]

00:09:56

MBL: In addition to eating here when you perform on Fridays do you ever come at other times?

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JJ: Yes, I do; yes, I do.

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MBL: With friends and family or on your own?

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JJ: I have brought friends and family. When my mom and dad was staying with me I used to bring them over. Everyone that has ever come to visit me probably I have brought here over the years pretty much.

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MBL: What do you think makes this restaurant so special? How has it thrived for so long?

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JJ: Well you have to credit the Bullys. His insight, his vision, and he keeps it small, family oriented, great atmosphere, and does not tolerate a lot of things that are outside their beliefs and I've always been very comfortable here. Everybody has always been very nice—the customers; never had any problems even during the times I've come here I've never seen any—any—any problems here. So I think they deserve the credit in keeping control over the business and the environment and the food and the people that they have working here and the atmosphere and the setting. It's just a down home feel and very much respected in our community—cherished.

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MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about the restaurant's role in the community as either a gathering space or a favorite restaurant?

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JJ: I would say it definitely has a role in the community. A lot of politicians, a lot of very prominent people have been here, coming in and eat at different times. A lot of networking, conversations; you get the opportunity to meet all kinds of people from all walks of life here, so its—its role in the community I would say would be first of all is a black-owned business that has thrived in this community for so many years is in and of itself something to be highly respected. And it is respected in the community. The food has maintained a level of excellence

throughout the whole—all the years that I've been coming here. So it's so many things that's taken into consideration but you have to give recognition to the owners in that they have kept it that way. So in the—it's respected and it is a gathering place and a lot of—a lot of very prominent well-known, from pastors to—. I mean if you look at the community around it's—it's a struggling community, and it's riddled with crime, but I think crime goes on everywhere you know whether seen or unseen.

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So I think it's just very much respected here in the community and a lot of people come. I've been here and I've seen people from Australia, bicycling, just all kinds of different walks of life come here and they generally will say well someone told me to come by and—.

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MBL: So as far as publicity you think a lot of it is word of mouth?

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JJ: Most definitely yes.

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MBL: Is there anything about Bully's that I have not asked you that you might want to share?

Do you have a favorite performance here?

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JJ: I'd have to say my most favorite performance here was the day Chokwe came in and I always knew that he liked *A Change is Going to Come* and I did perform those—that song and several others and he enjoyed it. One of the local pastors did a song with me while he was here. And just before he got ready to leave, I couldn't really see him to see if he enjoyed it or not, but just before he got ready to leave he stopped at the door. And—and he—and he turned around and he looked at me and he gave me a nod. And I noticed then he looked kind of frail, pale but he stopped at the door in front of where I performed and he turned around and looked at me and gave me a nod and it just humbled me. And he died that next—that next week. So that had to be my—the most touching and the most rewarding performance that I've done here since I've been here; yeah, definitely.

00:15:08

MBL: For those who may not know can you tell us a little bit about who he is?

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JJ: Chokwe Lumumba, he's—he was Mayor of Jackson. He's just done a lot of things in the African American community. His tenure as an attorney and his life—I have much respect for him and the cause and the things that he actually have tried to promote. And as they mentioned in his death he did and has done a lot of things to reach out to all walks of life. As you are well aware you're not always received by all walks of life. It doesn't necessarily mean you don't reach out or that you haven't tried. But he I thought was an amazing role model for a lot of young guys in the community. And you have to know a lot of things that he did was not public.

He was very private and a lot of people that he helped. And that's when you know the man when the spotlights are off.

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So I think he was an amazing man and he had my support 100-percent just simply because of his stance in the community and just I have much respect for the man. But he was Mayor of the City of Jackson and he did not get a chance to complete his term. He passed away. But he has—he is greatly missed in the community; yes.

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MBL: Now I understand there is a special election to replace him. Can you tell me a little bit about the candidates who are in the run-off?

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JJ: Only his son [*Laughs*]; that's the only one I can tell you about. Antar that's Chokwe's son; he's—he's running for mayor and so vote please. I have much respect for him because he was working directly with his father and he made a lot of contacts here and has reached out to a lot of people in the community and is in a very difficult position. I cannot imagine losing my father and then you know—. So I just have much respect for the entire family and the entire—the cause actually.

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MBL: Did you see them using this restaurant to meet the public during the campaigns?

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JJ: Not particularly; no, I didn't.

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MBL: They were just long-time diners already.

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JJ: I can't say for sure because that was my first time seeing him here. It was a day that he came in you know so I can't say for sure if they've used it for any—. That may be a question for Tyrone [Bully] if they used it for any political things or whatever you know. I'm not sure.

00:18:16

MBL: All right; well thank you very much for your time today. And I'll see you next Friday.

00:18:24

JJ: Oh you're coming back? Thank you; thank you.

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[End Janis Jordan Interview]