

MARK CALLAIS
M&M and C&G Boats—Golden Meadow, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen
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[Begin Mark Callais Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Tuesday, October 18, 2011. I'm in Golden Meadow, Louisiana at the home of Mark Callais. And if I could get you to say your name for me, please, and tell me your occupation, and we'll get started?

00:00:18

Mark Callais: Oh my name is Mark Callais. I'm 53 years old. Born and raised right here, right out of Golden Meadow, in a little town called Galliano. And--and I am a PR guy for a company, a boat--an offshore supply boat company in Golden Meadow called M&M and C&G Boats.

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SR: Okay, thank you. Could you tell me your birth date?

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MC: I was born February 1958—February 20, 1958.

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SR: Thank you. Just to give a little—tell about the setting a little bit, you told me—. We're at your home, and you told me that we were coming to an outdoor kitchen. Is that what you called it?

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MC: Yes, ma'am. It's--we built this home back in like '79, somewheres around there, and we do a lot of frying of foods and stuff like that, and--and me and my wife, we were just kind of tired of--of having all the food smells all over the house, so we ended up building an outdoor kitchen, and this is where we pretty much live. We--we will have our--our suppers at night, and after the kids are all fed and they go inside and take a shower and that's it. They go--they go to bed, so we pretty much live in our outside kitchen.

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SR: But we're not outside?

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MC: No, no, no, no, we're not outside. We bricked the floor and we put in some glass windows and we just do all of our cooking. We call it "outside kitchen," but it's just another room that's--that's attached to the house, but--but it's--it's just, you know, like 15--20 feet away from the house, but just attached to the house by glass windows.

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SR: It's nice. I mean we're at this great table. What is this table?

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MC: It's a table that—actually we had a smaller table than this and every time my parents or my brothers, sisters would want to have something going on at somebody's house they'd come borrow my table. So I figured I'd build a table big enough that where we couldn't pretty much pick it up and move it out of the house because thing weighs about 300 pounds.

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SR: It's wooden?

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MC: Yes, ma'am. It's made out of wood. It's made out of three-by-twelve pine boards and kind of shellacked it on the--on the top. And it's a little crooked but it--it serves the purpose.

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SR: Do you use your indoor kitchen?

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MC: Not at all. Our indoor kitchen, we took our refrigerator out and we put a computer in there. The stove—we don't use the stove and we don't--we don't use anything. It's actually very small but we--we don't use anything in there. You know my wife might store a couple of her good china in there, but that's--that's pretty much it.

00:03:07

SR: Well this is a great space. I love it. Well let's start with you telling me—. I guess let's start in the beginning. And you know, you're involved--you work around food right now. You didn't always, but it sounds like food was a big part of your upbringing.

00:03:27

MC: Yes, ma'am. My--my uncle owned the restaurant in Golden Meadow for years and years. It was called Randolph's Restaurant, and he's since then passed away. And--and then his--his son, Randy, Jr., is currently the culinary instructor at Nicholls State University right up the bayou in Thibodaux. And but my nephew is--has a restaurant in Golden Meadow. But what it was, my mom was in the catering business ever since I was a young boy. My mom and dad had a little catering business, and so we was always around food. You know food and preparing food for--for large numbers of people.

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And then when I got to be 18 years old, graduated from high school, didn't know pretty much what I wanted to do. I had a license to work offshore, so I started working for an offshore supply boat company right here out of Golden Meadow, and I was a captain for them. I worked 13 years for them, and it just every time that I—it was a five-man crew. Every time I'd get a new crew on there and they'd be cooking chicken pot pies and casseroles and stuff that I've never eaten before. So I just kind of took over the--the kitchen end of the wheelhouse, and whoever came on the boat, they was going to be designated my cook. They had to go through me, what they could cook, because I really didn't care for chicken pot pie. So it was two things: I ate what I wanted and I showed them how to cook Cajun food. So that's pretty much how that--how I got started with them, and did that for, like I said, 13 years.

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And then I went on to--to land a job with the people that I'm working for now, doing PR work for them and take care of their hunting and their fishing and their cooking; take care of a lot of their toys. Whatever they need done, wherever, whenever. They just call me and I--I get it done.

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SR: Tell me, because you know some of the terminology isn't that familiar to me: for the record, what--what does it mean to have a license to work offshore?

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MC: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm a licensed captain. I was working on an 180-foot offshore supply boat that we'd take care of the oil and gas industry offshore, working for the various oil companies out there. And you have to be licensed through the Coast Guard to run these vessels, and--and in the '80s when things got kind of bad I decided to go offshore and--and pursue a career in that, which was--which was really nice. You know I always liked offshore, liked the people, and different situations you get in. You meet a lot of different people and a lot of their—a lot of people that would come on the boats and cook different ways that they would cook, which I didn't care for, but that's--that's just how it was at that--at that time.

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SR: Because they were from different parts of the country?

00:06:44

MC: Yeah, they were from different parts of the country, and--and I guess different cultures. I grew up eating white beans and rice on Fridays, and fried fish, and lunchmeat sandwiches, and red beans and rice on Mondays, and sausage and I just--that's--that's how we grew up. That's how we grew up, you know, and you eat beans one day—white beans one day; the next day what was left over, you ate a bean soup you know. So it's--we were—. See, like my dad—. We were--we were poor, but I think we were more broke than poor. *[Laughs]*

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SR: That's a good way to put it. What was the reaction when you would introduce these people from other places to Cajun cooking?

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MC: Oh, they loved it. They--they liked our food right away, you know, like the way we cooked it because a lot of--a lot of these people that come from different areas, it was--it was meat and potatoes and no taste to it. I mean nothing whatsoever, and you know we--we have a little spice. I don't--I'm not a guy that likes hot food. I never did like hot food. But a lot of people—you know, I'll go to Lafayette and they'll just pour on the Tabasco, and I'm not like that. I--I like something to--to taste good, to have spices in it, but [if] it starts burning my lips, I--I don't like that too much you know. But these—you know every--everywhere we go—we go to San Antonio and cook. These people say, “How do you get this stuff to taste so good?”

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I say, “We start with onions.” Half of the people don’t even know what onions are. They never even—[they] say, “Onion? Where do you get onion from?” You know it’s just--they just--they just cook differently. That’s it.

00:08:27

SR: What does a supply boat supply?

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MC: We supply fuel and water; deck cargo, which could be anything from pipe to grocery boxes. Anything that--anything that you’d go to the grocery store or whatever you need to run your house. They need the same thing offshore, you know. Some of these platforms are anywhere from--from right off the beach to 100 miles out. And--and they need to get there somewhere. They--they can't get there by helicopter. Some things can be brought by helicopter, but the majority of your stuff has to be brought out there--brought out there by boat.

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And you--you load up your boat and take off and go out there, and then you unload it and they’ll send you back in to get another load or, you know, whatever. We transport people; just any--anything that you can think of that--that you use in your house, well, they need to use that offshore just as well, and--and it needs to get out there some kind of way.

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SR: So how long would you be gone?

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MC: At that time I used to work 14 and 7. I'd work 14 days on and come home for 7. And that was--that was pretty much good for me because after 14 days I had enough offshore, and after 7 days my wife had enough of me, so she was ready to send me back offshore also. But that's-- that's how I worked the majority of my career for that--that first company. It was 14 and 7.

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SR: And you had young kids at that point?

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MC: Yes, ma'am, I did. I had—in fact I had three--three young kids then. I was never home for nothing. Working 14 and 7, you never hit it right for Christmas, their birthdays, or anything. But I was fortunate enough, my--my last boy that was born—he's 17 now—and—and like I said, I've been working for this company for 16 years, so I got to at least—I got to at least see him raised. I got to see his birthdays and stuff like that, so I was fortunate enough to have at least one out of the four that I could be home for.

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SR: Hmm, that's good. What kind of kitchen situation did you have on the supply boat?

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MC: Well they were set up pretty nice. You know you had big galley, a pretty good-sized galley, an awesome stove. They always had pretty good stoves, commercial stoves on those

boats, and you--you know your typical freezers, refrigerators. We didn't have an ice machine, but we had walk-in coolers, so we--we had everything we needed to--to do our 14 days. When--when I'd go on the boat, the day before I'd go make my grocery bill, and--and then I'd load it in the truck, and then when we'd make our crew change. We would just unload everything we had and we'd put it in our freezers, and I knew day-by-day what we were going to cook every day.

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Like I said before, you know Mondays was red beans and Fridays was white beans, so we- threw stuff in- between—you know spaghetti or something like that during the week—but Sundays we always watched the Saints games, so we had to have maybe a few shrimp wrapped in bacon or something like that you know. But we--we used to make—I used to make my own grocery bill, and--and so we knew beforehand what we were going to cook that week.

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SR: I mean I know that you said to me earlier that when you worked for your mom for her catering company, you maybe did bartending or just helped out. But it sounds like maybe some of that organization—the organization skills that you need for catering—rubbed off on you, because that's a lot of planning.

00:12:01

MC: Yes, it sure--it sure was. You know even--even to this day with the things we do now, in a catering—you know my mom did mostly weddings, so everything had to be structured at a certain time of what needed to be done and put out and set up and everything. So it--it did rub off on me. You got to look ahead. If--if you don't look ahead, you're going to forget something.

And--and you can't always remember everything but you--you try to. But yeah, it--it definitely did help, that--that deal there you know with her—and also on the boats, too, because you got to plan 14 days in advance of what you're going to be cooking every day, so—. But yes, it did--it did help out a lot.

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SR: Is it true that on pretty much—excuse me—pretty much every supply boat, that the captain is in charge of the food? Or was that—did you just take that over?

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MC: No, they have a lot of cooks that'll--that'll go on the boat. I know when I was on there they had a couple other crews that—they would have like a guy and then his wife doing the cooking. But you know a couple of them that I can remember, they were--they were from down here, so they didn't have too much trouble about eating other people's food, you know.

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But it was—you know everybody had a cook on the boat but some captains did it and some didn't, you know. And I know they had captains from other places, and maybe they didn't want to eat our food. You know I really don't know, but--but I know the guys that will—. The guys that worked on them boats from down here, they pretty much eat--they pretty much eat still the Cajun food like what we cook today.

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SR: I guess you mentioned that there were guys who had their wives cook. I was wondering earlier—maybe a silly question, but were there women who worked on the boats?

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MC: Yes, yes, ma'am, you had a couple of women. You had a couple of women that worked on the--on the boats as cooks. And like I say, I had some before but I just--I just didn't like their cooking, so that's why I just elected to get another deckhand and just show him how to cook, and it--it was better for us that way.

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SR: I'm not familiar with the white-bean-on-Friday tradition. Does it have meat in it?

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MC: Uh, usually we use salt meat. That was--that's a big thing where we're at over here, is salt meat. You don't find salt meat too much anywheres; even towards like Lafayette they use tasso and--and andouille sausage and stuff like that, but we—it was a tradition over here that we used salt meat. And you--you'd have to boil it before you'd put it in the beans because it was so salty. You boil it, drain it, boil it again, and then you'd cut it up and put it in your beans. But it was--it was usually white beans with salt meat and either fried fish—or something fried, you know. That's--that's what we did on Friday; every Friday was like that.

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SR: Do you still do that?

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MC: Pretty much, yeah. In fact we cooked some this past Friday, but we didn't use the salt meat. We--we use smoked ham hocks, which is awesome. It has a really good flavor to it. It's--it's a lot easier than boiling the salt meat and putting it in there. But boy, when my mom makes a pot of white beans with salt meat, we all are there to eat it for sure.

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SR: So you live here in Golden Meadow at the end of a dead-end street, and it seems like all your family kind of lives around here. Is that right?

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MC: Yes, ma'am. I live at the end of the street. My mom and my dad lives right up the street from me. You know, like--like just walking distance, a couple 100 feet, and my daughter lives up the street right across from my mom and my dad. And on the next street, my brother-in-law lives there, and so we have—excuse me—it's just like we have like four families living in this one little bitty area. And when one cooks, everybody goes there. Except my daughter don't cook too much. She always comes over here to eat. But--but when my brother-in-law—he works on an offshore supply boat—but he works 28 and 14. So when he gets off, he's cooking every day and everybody on the street comes to eat.

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SR: So you said you grew up in Galliano. Is that--is that right?

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MC: Yes, ma'am, it--it's right. I lived right outside of Golden Meadow. I say I'm from Golden Meadow. My mom is from Golden Meadow. My dad was from Cut Off, and--and my wife taught school in Golden Meadow and always worked out of Golden Meadow, so I says Golden Meadow, but my address is actually Galliano.

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SR: Oh okay, so did you grow up right here on this street?

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MC: Yes, ma'am. I grew up right--right where my mom and dad live, where you saw earlier. Right--right there. They had another house and it--it had burnt like in the '80s, and then in '80-something they built that house. But I grew up right here all my life.

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SR: What did your father do for a living?

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MC: My father was a pumper for Texaco. He worked for Texaco until he retired, and I want to say he retired around 56--57 years old. And then--then he stayed with my mom in the catering business, but he was always in the oil field, and he was a fisherman. He was a fisherman at heart.

In fact he's 86 years old, and he still charter fishes out of Grand Isle, and he is probably the oldest charter fisherman in the state of Louisiana.

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SR: Oh, I see. So he takes people out fishing?

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MC: Yeah, he does a lot like what I do except it's just clients who I take fishing, but he does it for hire. He has a small boat that he'll--that he'll fish in, and it's pretty much on weekends that he fishes and—. In fact he had a trip the weekend before last. Now our weather, we're in October right now and our weather is starting to be a little bit more unstable. But I just looked at his house before we came in over here. He was fishing today, so—but I don't think he had a charter. I just think he has a vendetta against speckled trout, and I think he wants to catch every one.

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SR: [*Laughs*] What are your parents' names?

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MC: My mom is Neva. Her maiden name was a Cheramie. And my daddy's name is Irwin.

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SR: Is that N-e-v-a?

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MC: N-e-v-a, yeah, and then my dad is I-r-w-i-n—Irwin Callais. And like I say, he was born and raised in--in Cut Off.

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SR: Callais is a French name, right?

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MC: Yes, ma'am, it is. From what I can understand—my dad did an extensive background on--on us, but we really—for some reason we were from the Isle of Malta, which is Spanish ,but when the French took over a lot of that place it--we just—we're all French. My mom and dad speak French; I speak a little bit. And--and my grandfather, he died when I was probably 20 years old, and he couldn't speak any English at all. And but both of my grandmothers could speak—one of my grandmothers could speak and write French, and you don't--you don't see too many people that can do that in this day and age, is speak a foreign language like that and write it. But my grandmother died when she was in her 90s, and--and she could speak and write French fluently.

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SR: Do your kids speak French?

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MC: My oldest boy studied it in Wales and in France, and he speaks French very, very well.

And my youngest boy—all my kids had to go through French in school, so they get by. They can get by what they want to do. And my wife speaks pretty good French.

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SR: Is French required in school here?

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MC: It--it's not required. Well when they were in the younger grades they had to take it, but in the older grades—like my boy is a senior in high school now; he's finished all his languages. But it was--it was easier for him to take French. He went all the way through to French Four, I believe, and it was just easier since you took French One the year before, and you had to take a language it was just easier just to take the next step in French. So that's why he—they mostly did it like that.

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SR: We should say for the record: How many children do you have?

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MC: I have four children. My oldest is--is 31, and I have a daughter that's—. And he's getting ready to graduate at UL this year with his masters in architecture. And I have a daughter that is 29; she has two children and she works at a physio-fit place in Golden Meadow, that they help people with injuries and things like that. And I have—my third child is a daughter and she's in

her last year of Nicholls College for—she’s just going to end up with a general studies degree.

And my youngest boy is 17, and he’s a senior at South Lafourche High School in Galliano.

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SR: Wow, those are some accomplishments.

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MC: Yeah, they—they--it’s a long trial for sure to raise four kids, and then have three of them graduating this year, so—. That’ll be good.

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SR: You’re going to be doing some cooking.

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MC: Yeah, I think so. I think so. My daughter—every time I go somewhere and I come back—
. My two daughters were looking at a Saints game a couple weeks ago and said, “Daddy, what are you cooking today?” I said, “Man, I just come back from cooking.” They said, “I don’t care; we want a jambalaya.” So I had--I said, “Well,” I said, “Y’all go get the stuff and I’ll cook it.”
During the—it took me three hours to make it, so I didn’t get to see much of the game, but I made them a jambalaya.

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SR: Can you tell me a bit about your jambalaya, how you make it?

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MC: This one, it was a shrimp--a shrimp and sausage jambalaya, and it's--it's all in the sauce. You know it just--just takes a while to get everything down and cook your onions down to where they're good and--and brown, really, really brown, and just a can or two of Rotel. And--and then you put your sausage in there and you just got to make sure everything is cooked down really, really well. And I like to use Zatarain's rice. It's a pre-cooked rice, and once your sauce is made I just double my water—throw my rice in there, double my water and--and keep stirring it until the rice wants to float a little bit. And you put it on a low, low fire, and it--it usually comes out pretty good.

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SR: What do you mean, “double your water?”

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MC: I'll take my rice. Let's say it's five pounds. I'll put it in a bowl. And I'll mark it with a Marks-A-Lot or something; you know just a Marks-A-Lot to make sure how much rice I have. I'll take my rice back out of the bowl and then I'll put a bowl of water, dump it in there, put another bowl of water, dump it in there, and then get it--get it boiling again and get everything boiling real good. And then you dump your rice in your--in your sauce. And you just keep stirring it. And you're going to notice that your rice is going to want to float. And you can't do it with regular rice because regular rice, it—the water, the way you cook it with the water wouldn't be the same. And I don't know exactly what that would be with regular rice because I don't--I

don't use that. I don't use regular rice in a jambalaya. I just, like I said, use that Zatarain's. And it's--it's a brown—I don't even know how to explain it. It's just a--it's a pre-cooked rice, but it's not a white rice. It's--it's more of a brown rice.

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SR: Do you cover the pot ever, or are you going to keep it open?

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MC: No, I--I keep it open and stir and stir and stir until that rice really, really wants to float. Then I'll turn that fire real, real low and I'll put the cover on it and just check it every couple of minutes, you know, and just--just kind of stir it around, because you don't want it to stick on the bottom. You got to use a--a real low fire, and--and the main thing on a jambalaya like that is if you can use a good thick pot it'll keep the—you know the pot will stay really hot so it'll cook all the way around. You can either cook it in a black iron pot or a Magnalite pot, and that one I cooked the other day, it was a small black iron pot that I used. And you can tell when you use black iron to a Magnalite, your black iron—all the stuff you'll cook in a black iron pot is going to come out a little darker than it would--than it would in a Magnalite pot. Don't ask me why. That's just how it--that's just how it works.

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SR: Do you always prefer the black iron?

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MC: No, not always. No, not always. In our gumbos we use Magnalites. You know we don't—we won't cook a gumbo in a black iron pot. But when you're going to get to your rôti and--and your stews, it's--it's better in a black iron pot. And it just tastes better and it's a little darker, what you want, and that way you don't have to cheat and put Kitchen Bouquet in it.

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SR: What is a rôti?

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MC: A rôti is, we usually use a pork—it's a pork rôti. We'll use a little bit of onions in--in a black iron pot and get them going good, and we put that—we'll put cut up pork like in maybe one-inch cubes. We put it in there and we just cook it down until it wants to fall apart. You know we might--we might use a little Lipton onion soup mix or something with some mushrooms in there and just put like maybe one packet. It depends on how much you have. And you just cook it down with—. And it's just all in its juices, with a little bit of Louisiana Hot Sauce. I love Louisiana Hot Sauce. That's--that's probably one of my favorite things that we use. And we have a seasoning that we made that we get made in Abbeville, and I use that, and it--it's something like a Tony Chachere's, but it's not as much salt. And-- and it's pretty good, and we just cook it down and you can eat it over rice. That's when we would use white rice. You can eat it over rice or you can get a piece of French bread and make a little hole in it and put some of it in there and eat it like--like a po-boy, you know.

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But it's pretty good.

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SR: Well what's the difference between doing that with pork and making a pork stew?

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MC: Pork stew would be a little bit more water; you know, it would be a little more water. A rôti, you would want it more--more dry. You would want it drier. You wouldn't want—it would be thicker. That's what--is what I'm trying to say. A rôti would be a lot thicker than the stew would be. The stew would be a lot more watery, and--and almost in a stew like that you could almost put carrots and potatoes if you wanted. You know in a stew; not in a rôti. But in the rôti, it's just a--it's just a lot drier.

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SR: Do you use flour or--or a roux in either of those?

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MC: I don't use--I don't use a flour in the rôti. But you could in the stew if you wanted. I don't see where that would--that would hurt anything, putting or using a roux in there. But it's just, I don't know; it's just the different ways that they can be cooked. They're both good. Don't get me wrong; they're both good. You--you can't hardly mess up pork, you know.

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SR: Okay, I'd like to get to your current job, which is how I met you. And it's kind of fascinating. Can you describe how cooking plays a part in being a PR person for a company that owns a lot of vessels?

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MC: Well when--when I met you, we were in Grand Isle at--at the Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo, and I want to say we had just finished boiling some crabs. And I think we were starting to cook a crab and shrimp étouffée. I'm almost positive that's what it was. And we just have customers that were there, and—and we need to feed them, and we're not going to buy them—we're not going to give them a sandwich, you know what I'm saying. So we--we decided that day we was going to cook a crab and--and shrimp étouffée. And the thing about it is, a lot of our customers might not be from around here. They might be from Houston and Dallas and whatever, and they don't want to come over here to eat a steak. You know they can eat a steak anywheres they want to go and probably eat a real good steak.

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But we--we like to give them more of a Cajun--a Cajun show, and that's why we like to have our boiled crabs and have our boiled shrimp when they come. That's pretty much every weekend on the agenda, is--is boiled seafood, and we'll do an étouffée and like that. But since--since I had met you then, we--we have since hired a--a young boy, a young man, and he comes from the culinary school in Thibodaux, and he's originally from Golden Meadow. He is from Golden Meadow. He lives in New Orleans now, but he's--he's a young fellow that just finished at culinary school, so a lot of the cooking stuff that goes on in the houseboat, he's taking care of that now while I'm doing the fishing or the hunting. And so he--he just gives us a hand in doing

a little different thing. And he--he's pretty good. For a young fellow he's coming around pretty-- pretty well.

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SR: What is his name?

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MC: Oh I'm sorry. His name is Scott Louviere and like I said, he's originally from Golden Meadow, and it's amazing how you meet somebody like this. You know I've always known the boy and I went to school with his dad, and--and one day I was cooking at my wife's school, and--and his daddy and my wife was teaching at the same school. And I even told him, I said, "Boy, I sure wish I could find somebody to give me a hand on the houseboat because I need somebody to help me this summer." He said, "Scott is looking for a job." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, he's looking for a job." I said, "I thought he was in pharmaceutical school." He said, "He was; he hated it." And he--he said, "I wanted to kill him but he wanted to do food, you know stuff with food, so he went to the culinary school and he's looking for a summer job." So this is his fourth year that he's working for us now, and then this year we--we hired him on full-time. So he has his hands full for sure.

00:31:01

SR: So explain—well, first of all, can you explain to me what C&G Boats does?

00:31:13

MC: C&G Boats stand for Cheramie and Guilbeau. It's Mr. Albert Cheramie is one of our--one of our bosses, and Mr. Anthony Guilbeau, who passed away a couple years ago—three years ago. And that's the boat company. That's--that's our boat company that they own and I work for, and that's the boats that we go offshore and supply these--these oil companies with all their supplies. We have—don't get me wrong; I think we have 11 boats now. We have some boats that are 220-feet long and the boats that are--that are 125-feet long. But we're mostly in the--in the big offshore supply boats.

00:32:02

SR: And so your customers are who?

00:32:06

MC: Our customers, we kind of target the smaller oil companies. We kind of--we tend to stay away from the Exxon Mobil and--and stuff like that. We--we get mostly the smaller oil companies. They just--they have a lot more—all these big companies are going for all that deepwater stuff, and--and our boats are not—they're not equipped to take care of, you know, the far-off stuff in the Gulf that—. Like we can do close on the shelf. And the shelf means 600-feet on inland.

00:32:47

SR: And so when you are entertaining customers, they're people who already are hiring your boats, or who might hire your boats?

00:32:56

MC: Yes, ma'am, and most of them—they're the people that--that we are working for, and it's just to show appreciation, you know, and they get to come down here and I'll bring them fishing and we'll feed them for a weekend. And it's just--sometimes it's just friends, some friends of the family that want to come down and--and so we pretty much take care of them like that.

00:33:21

SR: And so you mentioned the houseboat. Can you tell me what that is?

00:33:25

MC: Yeah, we have a self-propelled houseboat. We keep it in Grand Isle and it's 85-feet long and it's 35-feet wide and it's two stories. And we--we'll bring it wherever I need to bring it. I'll usually mainly stay in Grand Isle—from Grand Isle to Golden Meadow. We usually stay in Grand Isle from April through October. In fact, I'm fixing--I'm fixing to go pick it up any day now and bring it back to Golden Meadow. But once it gets to Golden Meadow, we don't do--we don't do anything with that boat there because it's too big to go to our hunting lease. It draws too much water, so we don't use that one to do our hunting during the winter, but—.

00:34:13

So, it's just from Golden Meadow to--to Grand Isle with that one there.

00:34:17

SR: And you don't have it there in the winter just because it's kind of too cold to entertain, or—
?

00:34:22

MC: Well it—yeah, Grand Isle is--it's a ghost town after Labor Day. You can't depend on the weather. The north wind is really horrible in Grand Isle, and so what we--we do a lot of hunting, and duck hunting and deer hunting in the Larose area, which is 15--18--15 miles from here—something like that—further towards the north. And we have another houseboat that we take and we go into the marsh from there and we have to—we bring our people, our customers, by boat and we'll go by boat there and we'll just either duck hunt or deer hunt or maybe go run some jug lines or something like that.

00:35:04

SR: What does that mean—run a jug line?

00:35:05

MC: Oh for catfish. I'm sorry. Running jug lines for catfish. We'll set up some--some lines, attached to a brick with a hook on it, and put some bait out with a Clorox jug or a Coke bottle jug or something like that, and throw it out there. And then we just go and check them the next day, and usually we catch some pretty nice catfish on them.

00:35:25

SR: So when you're doing that, are you sleeping on the houseboat?

00:35:29

MC: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. We're sleeping on our other one. We have--we have two houseboats. We have one that's a lot smaller, a little bit smaller than this, and it doesn't draw as much water, so we can take it back and forth to our--our hunting place. And--and it takes us like an hour and a half to get there. So we just--we just take it there, and then we'll have it set up and when the customers come I'll run to the front with the--with another boat and pick them up and bring them to the back.

00:35:57

SR: When you are hunting and running jug lines, are you eating what you catch?

00:36:02

MC: Oh for sure, especially the catfish. They are the best. We'll--we'll fry up these catfish. If we kill a deer we'll put some—you know we'll--we'll put some meat on the pit. Ducks, most of the time we don't clean too many ducks back there. We'll bring what we had killed the week before and then we can--we'll cook those. But the ducks--the ducks that we do kill, we send them to a cleaner and then we'll pick them up during the week and have them all packed and ready to go for the following week.

00:36:33

SR: Did you hunt growing up?

00:36:35

MC: Always. I was--I was brought up hunting and fishing all my life. I--we had six kids in our family. There was five boys and one girl and I'm pretty much the only one that really liked to hunt. All my other brothers—I have two brothers that were charter fishermen, but I'm the only one that really, really stuck with the hunting. My other—I don't know; maybe they didn't like to get up as early in the morning as I did, but I'm the only one that--that really stuck with the hunting.

00:37:08

SR: So you already knew how to—I don't know—clean a deer before you got this job?

00:37:12

MC: Oh yeah, yeah. We--we clean all the deer. Like I said, the only thing we don't clean is the ducks, but if a customer comes, if he kills a deer I'll clean it. The deer, the catfish; sometimes we'll catch redfish back there, but any--anything that needs to be done, I'll make sure it's done for sure.

00:37:35

SR: So with the catfish, you fry them. Anything else; any other preparations?

00:37:40

MC: No. I had some people that make a courtbouillon with them, but I don't know. People—it's so much easier to make—you know, just fry catfish; you know cut them up and fillet them up and make sure all the red meat is out, and we fry it and it's awesome. It's really good. And then

some of the redfish, we'll take it and save it and when we have enough we'll make a bouillabaisse, which is something like a courtbouillon, but we'll make a bouillabaisse and that's—
-that's pretty good too.

00:38:10

SR: Does your bouillabaisse base have tomato in it?

00:38:13

MC: Yes, ma'am, but very—very—. The way we cook it, and that's from Mr. Magnus Arceneaux, is the one that—that—first time that I ever ate a bouillabaisse, and it's very good. Very easy to make but very, very good. And he just layers onions and puts—starts with a little bit of olive oil in a pot, and he'll put his onions, bell peppers, celery—a layer of that. And he'll lay his—put his fish. And all his fish is going to be cut up in cubes; not nothing too big but nothing small. He'll layer--layer it with that and then layer—put a layer of shrimp on--on there, and then he'll start the process all over again—onions, bell peppers, and then he puts his fish all the way to the top. And once he gets to the top he takes some crushed tomatoes and he--and he puts it all over on the top with his olives and some lemons, and you put it on the fire and you don't touch it for 45 minutes. And it's on kind of a slow fire; you don't want to put it on too high. Don't ever stir in the pot. He'll cut your fingers off.

00:39:20

But don't stir until it's ready, and you eat that with some French or garlic toast or Texas toast or whatever—pretty good stuff.

00:39:28

SR: So you don't cook the seasoning vegetables before you layer them in?

00:39:34

MC: No, ma'am. Everything is cooked all at that one time, and--and you would think that you need to add water but the fish and the shrimp have enough water in it to keep it going. And it—when you pull that cover off, it's--it's a little soupy, and it is really good. It's really good. And then he also—you know, as his layers go he seasonings it—puts seasonings as he needs it. And--and it just—with the water and all your stuff, it makes a--it makes a good sauce.

00:40:09

SR: Wow, that sounds good. When I met you, you were with Magnus. Can you tell me who he is?

00:40:15

MC: Mr. Magnus Arceneaux, that is Joey Arceneaux 's dad. Joey Arceneaux is one of my bosses in the--in the C&G organization. And he--he's a young fellow. He's—I think he just turned 50 years old and made--made good for himself in the boat business, really knows what he's talking about and really knows what he's doing. And but he's not a cook like his dad. His dad is an awesome cook. I think Joey can cook if he wanted, but he has me and Scott and his dad to do the cooking, so he—we just do it for him, so—. But that--that's who--that's who he is, and Mr. Magnus is an awesome cook. And he says he learned it from his father-in-law, and his father-in-law was a Vinet, Nolan Vinet, and he was an oysterman. And did oystering for years

and years. But he said he was--he was the cook—that's where he learned how to cook, was from Mr. Nolan Vinet.

00:41:19

SR: Did Mr. Magnus—was cooking his career, or is this a sort of retirement thing that he does?

00:41:26

MC: No, uh-uh. Mr. Mag worked for a boat company also like I did, but he was more of a port captain; hands-on guy; welder; little bit of everything. When Joey--when Joey took over in this business here, he kind of went and worked for his dad, and [Magnus] takes care of a lot of things that Joey needs done around the—you know, around his place in Maurice or Lafayette or whatever. Wherever he needs him or me, we just--we just go.

00:41:56

SR: The time when you were with Magnus and I met you, one thing he made was ragu aux patates. Is that how you say it; can you say that for me?

00:42:06

MC: [*Laughs*] Yeah, we made a ragu aux patates, and--and it's so simple. I forgot about that. It's--it's really a simple menu. I think at that time we was probably using some deer sausage that we had--we had killed, so we had some deer sausage. And sometimes we use the deer sausage with a deer ground meat. It's just the same thing as a sausage, but just not in the casing.

00:42:32

You brown your onions down just a little; you don't want them too dark because then it's going to make everything dark. And you brown--you brown your onions down a little bit, and you put your meat in there and you kind of get your meat seared a little bit. And then you just add your potatoes and add a little water and every now and then you stir it just a little bit and cook it down and--and put your seasonings, and--and it is pretty good.

00:42:56

That's another meal that--that we grew up on, and I think it's because it was cheap and you could feed a lot of people.

00:43:06

SR: But it was one of the best things I've ever eaten. I had never had anything like that.

00:43:08

MC: Yeah, it--it's pretty good. Like I said, we--we grew up on that. And because in them days sausage was cheap and potatoes were cheap. You couldn't get anything--anything cheaper than that, and you can--you can feed a whole bunch of people and it's good the next day. You know, heat it up. And there was no such things as microwaves then, but you could heat it up the next day and--and it would be just as good as the day you cooked it.

00:43:36

SR: Do you eat that with rice?

00:43:37

MC: Yeah, a lot of people eat it with rice. I'm not too much of a big rice person. Never was. But I just kind of like it like that, just--just with the potatoes and the meat. But a lot of people do eat it over the rice.

00:43:51

SR: Now when I had that, when I met y'all, you were not cooking in the kitchen of the houseboat.

00:43:59

MC: Oh no, no. We very seldom cook inside--inside the boat. We have these—what they call them is Cajun Cadillacs. It's--it's a burner about—maybe about a foot around—and actually it's two burners in one. And Mr. Mag would make a stand for me. It's actually made to sit on a stand, just to sit on a flat surface, and you can put your pot on it. But since then Mr. Mag perfected a stand with our different pots, and because all our pots are different sizes, so each stand goes with a certain pot. And we all cook outside, drink a couple beers, and just talk with people. And then you can smell the food cooking from piers away—you know, boats away. They can smell what's going on, but everything is done pretty much outside.

00:44:50

Even when we go cook—when we go cook different places, we have a big cooking trailer that I pull with--with my truck. And we have a 25-by-25 tent that we set up, and we have lights and everything—generator on the trailer—and we just set up wherever we need to be and cook outside.

00:45:10

SR: It strikes me that Cajuns really like to cook outdoors.

00:45:15

MC: You know when my mom and all was doing the catering, of course you can't do that, but--but you know that goes back to our boucherie when we were kids—and we still do them every now and then. You know it's all outside cooking when you do your--your blood stew or your pork rôti or your cracklings. And it's all high heat, high fire, and it just needs to be cooked outside. And I guess--I guess that's why we still do it like that. You know it would be hard to cook inside a building with the--with the equipment that we have to cook with now.

00:45:55

SR: Right. Because you're cooking for a lot of people sometimes, right?

00:46:01

MC: Yeah, sometimes we might have 400--500 people. You know sometimes we'll just have 100. And like Mr. Mag would say, "Just put more stuff in if you need to cook more." You know, if you need to feed more people just add a little bit more stuff. He doesn't keep any recipes. He doesn't have one thing written down. Everything is in his head. But I've been--I've been getting it from him little by little and jotting it down on paper and come home; I have my wife, Sandy, put it on the computer. And I know he's not going to be here forever but he just—I say, "Mag, why don't you just write it down?" He says, "I ain't got time for that."

00:46:38

So, and that's just--that's just how he is you know. But he's an awesome cook. I can tell you that. He's way better than I am. He's just an awesome cook.

00:46:47

SR: How old is Mr. Magnus?

00:46:49

MC: Mr. Mag is 72 or 73. Yeah, I know it's in January, his birthday is, but I think he's going to be 73. But he--he just—he never did write down anything. I'm the only one that writes it down now because I'm going to need to know some of them secrets he has later on.

00:47:10

SR: Okay, what are some secrets? I mean is it—is it in the browning, or is it in the seasoning?

00:47:21

MC: I think it's both. I really think it's both. But he just, you know, he'll put somebody stirring in a pot of onions and he says, "Stir until I tell you to stop." And--and that's what they do. You know, and they just--they say, "Hey Mag, you want to come check this stuff out?" "No, keep stirring." He won't even go look at it. He'll say, "Keep stirring." And every now and then he'll just go peek and look and see what it looks like. And when he needs to add something he'll add it in, but it's just the--the way it looks; he doesn't time anything. There's nothing timed. It's just--it's just the way of the color, you know—whenever he thinks the color is right, well that's when he'll do his next step. And he's not a guy that—I've never seen that before, but he's not a guy

that will take his onions and bell peppers and--and celery. He don't throw that all in one time; that's all in different stages. His onions go in first. He browns his onions. Then he's going to go in and he's going to brown his celery. And then he's going to go in and brown his bell peppers, and it's all in a stage. Everything is in a stage.

00:48:30

But you can really tell at the end that it's—I find it's better the way he does it.

00:48:38

SR: Do y'all chop everything outdoors too, or do you show up with prepped ingredients?

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MC: It all depends on what we got going on. If--if we know we've got to start early in the morning we might cut it the day before—cut everything up. I put them in gallon bags, ice them up real good. But if we have--if we don't have to have something ready, for in the afternoon, we'll cut it during the day and just--just get everything ready there. But it's a mortal sin to buy something already chopped. You don't buy nothing chopped. The only thing he buys that might be chopped is garlic. Other than that you got to chop it yourself.

00:49:13

SR: You mentioned that—I think it was with the bouillabaise that he started with olive oil. Is that the preferred oil that y'all use?

00:49:19

MC: Uh, just on--just in there. Most of the time we—like in beans we'll put a little cooking oil, and if he's going to start off his gratons, his--his cracklings, he's going to start with a little cooking oil. But I don't know if too many other—. I do a shrimp pasta, more like a fettuccini, that I use--that I use olive oil in. But for some reason he uses olive oil in--in the redfish bouillabaisse, yeah.

00:49:52

SR: What about for frying your catfish?

00:49:55

MC: No, that's all done pretty much with peanut oil. He--he likes the peanut oil or sunflower seed oil or something like that. But it's—mostly it's peanut oil.

00:50:09

SR: Most of this cooking that we're talking about is one-pot. Is that right?

00:50:14

MC: Right, right, right, yeah. When you're going to cook like that bouillabaisse—is that what you're talking about, something like—?

00:50:25

SR: Or most of the dishes we're talking about.

00:50:27

MC: Yes, ma'am. It's--it's mostly all one-pot, you know. Like if you—you know all the--all the big dishes like the jambalayas—because you can cook a jambalaya in a pot for 300 people. And he just eyeballs the pot and he tells you, “Get 30 pounds of rice for this,” and his--his recipe for that; he just knows what to do. But if it's—if you use 30 pounds of rice, well, he's going to have to double that in meat you know. And it don't matter if it's chicken, sausage, or whatever—or chicken and sausage—he--he's just going to—he doubles that in meat, and that's just his formula. It's not a recipe really; it's just because some pots can take a lot and some pots can't.

00:51:11

But he has a black iron pot that, when it's filled to the top, you could feed 300 people easy.

00:51:18

SR: Will he make one jambalaya in that pot?

00:51:20

MC: One jambalaya; it will be one jambalaya in that single pot and you can eat it from the top to the bottom, and it--it's not going to stick and it's going—the last scoop is going to be just as good as the first scoop.

00:51:36

SR: I can't keep my rice from getting mushy if I make it for six people.

00:51:41

MC: It's just--it's just a matter of—I think it has a lot to do with the rice. I really do. I think it has a lot to do with the rice. But I'm not going to tell you that it's 100-percent sure that's what it was, but our jambalaya is never mushy. Never. I--I've been, like I said, with this company for 16 years. I have never eaten a brown jambalaya until I started working with Mr. Mag because we always ate a red jambalaya. That's what my mom always cooked. I never even heard of a brown jambalaya. And her red jambalaya was with more tomato sauce and I found—. I don't want to tell her that, but I did find that sometimes it was mushy, but she was using white rice. And then when we started making this brown jambalaya, she really likes it but she's never going to say it's as good as hers. No way. **[Laughs]**

00:52:45

SR: What about breakfasts? We haven't talked about breakfast at all. What do you cook for breakfast if you're cooking for clients, or even when you were on the supply boat?

00:52:56

MC: Most of the time at breakfast, you know Scott will just—he doesn't do anything special, just biscuits—because we're all getting ready to go fishing anyway—just biscuits and sausage and coffee and stuff like that. But when we do—when we go to the shoots or--or whatever, we'll cook beignets, bread dough; we'll fry bread dough beignets and coffee and that's pretty much it. And we'll have you know the good Steen's [cane] syrup and--and stuff like that. But we--we're not really—we never really do a big, big breakfast deal. Our thing is more of a dinner—a lunch and a dinner.

00:53:38

SR: What about dessert?

00:53:40

MC: We used to do a lot of—we used to do some desserts when we had one fellow working for us, but the way--the way we do our cooking, we don't have an oven when we go places in our cooking trailer. We don't have an oven, so we--we don't do too much desserts. Usually when we go to a place—like in Lafayette, when we go cook, they might have 10 booths like us that--that are doing all kinds of cooking. So they might have one of them that's--that's doing either ice cream and pies and stuff like that. But—but we usually don't do a dessert.

00:54:21

SR: What do you mean when you go to Lafayette? What is that?

00:54:23

MC: When we go do a skeet shooting, for a skeet shoot. Twice a year we go to a--to a place in Lafayette, Wilderness Gun Club, and then they—one of them is like a benefit for a boy that--that died of an aneurysm, and--and they have a memorial fundraiser for that every year. And then the next one, it's like—I want to say it's Look to the Stars; something for children. And that's the two main ones we do in Lafayette. And--and then we have a lot of people that do a lot of cooking. You know they might have, like I say, 10 people doing something like what we're doing in different booths. So you know you might go to one booth and might have a daiquiri, just

a daiquiri booth, or some of them just cold drinks—pop and water—or one of them has beer. And it's just some other people are cooking—big smokers and doing briskets and stuff. They have a lot of people that show up to do this and--and they show up to shoot, so it's a big fundraiser for a good cause.

00:55:35

SR: What about gumbo? Do you make gumbo?

00:55:38

MC: We--we do a gumbo, but the gumbos—it's not the traditional gumbo like my mom would make. Mr. Mag is not a—he's not a real guy on a roux, so he makes—. When we go in the back [hunting], we love his duck gumbo. And he makes it without a roux. And--and he just gets his onions, I mean very, very, very, very dark, almost black, and he starts--starts from there.

00:56:11

Everybody really raves about it. I love it, you know. My mom don't make it like that. She makes it with a roux. I don't--I don't make gumbos because I got my mom on one side and Mr. Mag on the other side, so I really—. I really help Mr. Mag do his, but like I say, he does it without a roux and people will eat it, and I don't think you can tell the difference. You can't tell--you can't tell if there is a roux in there or not. It's just the way he cooks it.

00:56:41

SR: Does he use either okra or filé?

00:56:43

MC: He'll use some filé. He doesn't do any okra. Not--not that I've seen; I've seen him do a seafood gumbo and that duck gumbo, two different gumbos, and he'll use filé and he'll put a little filé in it. And my mom does the same thing. She'll--she'll make two pots, usually like for the holidays, one with the filé and one without a filé. And they're both--they're both good. Even if I get hers, the one without the filé, I'll end up--I'll end up putting it in myself.

00:57:18

SR: Oh, you have a little jar of filé on the table?

00:57:19

MC: I have a jar of filé that I just got. A guy just gave it to me. His mom made, a fellow from Raceland, and she gives--she gives me a little jar every year and she makes a pretty good one.

00:57:30

SR: It's a little baby food jar.

00:57:32

MC: Little, and I don't know what's the--what's the story behind that, but every jar of filé you see on a counter—and a lot of times, you wouldn't believe it, but you see them in feed stores. Why in a feed store? I don't know. I guess it's the people, that a lot of these people has vegetables or whatever, but you—I don't know. You just--you just see that, and you just see

them in a baby food jar. And every feed store I went to, they have them; they have them for sale in there. But it's always in a baby food jar. Why? I don't know. I'd have to look into that.

00:58:05

SR: When your mom serves a pot with filé and a pot without, is it the same gumbo?

00:58:11

MC: The same gumbo; just--exact same gumbo. She'll make it, and then she'll take half of it out and--and put filé in it, and the other one just stays like that. My kids don't--they don't care for the filé too much, but I do. I like it because it thickens it up a lot. And--and like I said before, I don't eat a whole bunch of rice, so I like it thick. But I put my potato salad in my gumbo anyway.

00:58:34

A lot of people don't do that, but you know I think it's about half and half. I know me and my--my sister will eat it like that, but I like my potato salad—and it has to be cold, cold potato salad in a hot gumbo.

00:58:46

SR: Do you stir your potato salad in, or you just sort of put a spoonful in there?

00:58:51

MC: No, I don't stir it in. I just put a big old plop in there, and then I just kind of—when I eat my gumbo with a spoon, I'll just take a little bit of--of the potato salad with a little bit of the gumbo in it.

00:59:03

SR: What if there's no potato salad?

00:59:06

MC: Oh, there's always a potato salad. [*Laughs*] I can tell you that. There's always a potato salad at our house for when we have gumbo for sure.

00:59:13

SR: What about like when Mr. Magnus is making the duck? Does he make potato salad with that one?

00:59:18

MC: No. That I can tell you there, he doesn't. We don't do a potato salad. We just eat it like that, but I still won't eat the rice. But his duck gumbo is pretty good. I got to admit it's very good.

00:59:31

SR: So I'm trying to envision it. So is it—is the broth real dark?

00:59:36

MC: It's dark; it--it looks just like a gumbo that you would--that you would have a roux in it. It is--it is really dark. I don't know how to explain it. He just--he gets it down really, really dark, and--and if you eat it and you're going to say, "Boy, there was a good roux in there, huh?" You can taste the roux, and I'll guarantee you're going to say, "Yeah." "But there's no roux in it—none.

00:59:59

SR: Does he use a duck stock or just water?

01:00:02

MC: We buy—it's mostly like a chicken stock. You can buy it in the boxes, and that's what we use mostly. When we need any kind of stock we--we use that. We really don't have time to make our own stock. It's a shame because we throw--we throw a lot of stock away, especially seafood. Like when we're boiling our shrimp, and--and shrimp and crawfish and stuff. It's all good stock; it's just that we--we don't have time to save it.

01:00:31

SR: Uh-hm.

01:00:31

MC: But I can tell you what he does use a lot. And I do buy a lot of it when I can, is oyster water. We have a--a guy that we buy our oysters from, and he'll save the water and it's cheap.

You know I think we buy it for like \$1 a half gallon or something like that. And he'll use a lot of--a lot of that. If he needs some water he'll--he'll definitely use oyster water.

01:00:54

SR: For making what?

01:00:57

MC: Anything, any gumbo; even in--even in a jambalaya. If he can get some oyster--extra oyster water, he'll use that. If he needs to put water, he'll use that. And it's already got your little salt taste in it, and--and it's thick. It's already thick, and that's what he uses. If he can get it he'll use that.

01:01:19

SR: I guess you should tell me for the record what oyster water is.

01:01:22

MC: It's when they're opening oysters and you're putting them in a pot. These--these companies that open oysters, you have to wash them before you can re-sell them. So all the oysters are going to go in a pot and the water—they'll sell the water, but the oysters—they can't sell the oysters in their own water. The oysters have to be washed before they can put it back in a container. So a lot of the oyster water that originally comes when they open up the shell, a lot of the water that originally comes out of there is thrown away. But some people like us, we--we'll ask for it and they'll save it for us and then we just get to use the water.

01:02:07

SR: Where do you get your oysters?

01:02:10

MC: Well I used to get a lot of my oysters from Wilbert Collins in--in Golden Meadow. He had the best around. He--he fished a lot in Barataria Bay and--and places like that, but since the BP oil spill, it pretty much kind of wiped him out in that part of Grand Isle. And--and it wasn't so much as the—from what he told me, it wasn't so much as the oil spill; it was more of the Davis Pond. When they opened Davis Pond to try and flush some of this oil out of the marsh, it was the freshwater that killed a lot of his oysters. So he--he doesn't have much left to oyster—to fish—now. He might be fishing a little bit towards--towards Terrebonne Parish, but I'm not really sure. I haven't seen him selling any oysters since the BP oil spill for sure, so that--that hurt him a lot.

01:03:06

But that's where I would get most of my—the majority of my oysters came from Wilbert Collins right there in Golden Meadow.

01:03:12

SR: What about shrimp?

01:03:15

MC: Shrimp, you know we--we still are doing good on shrimp. You know I bought some last week and I haven't had any really—not that I know of—haven't had any problems. Nice. They've

been very, very pretty stuff. And they're--they're good. We boiled some Saturday—Friday night and Saturday we boiled some. And nothing wrong with them; they're awesome. Y'all need to come get some.

01:03:41

SR: How has the oil spill affected your business, if it has?

01:03:48

MC: Well it--it did affect our business a little bit. It--it put a hold on a lot of things that were being done offshore, and like I said, we are in the offshore oil industry. And when you get a hold put on—like what the government is doing to us—it--it slows down. We're fortunate enough that a lot of our work is--is not new stuff. It's just work-over stuff, so we're fortunate enough to--to keep going like that. But all the moratorium and the permit process is just—it's just bad for the whole community.

01:04:28

And when our oil industry is bad everything is bad over here. That's just the way we--that's just the way we work. Everything surrounds the oil industry, and when that's bad everything is bad.

01:04:41

SR: Do you consider yourself in the—I guess maybe the boat business? I was going to say the boat business, the oil business, the food industry—what?

01:04:52

MC: Yeah, well my--my business—our business—is boat business. You know the oil-field-related business. But on--on the second thing, you know you got to do things to--to help out that business, and that's where it comes in what we're doing these different functions, cooking for people. Everything is oil-field-related.

01:05:21

SR: Your job sounds fun and kind of perfect for you, not to put words in your mouth. But what is your favorite part about your job?

01:05:35

MC: Not to be in an office every day. That's--that's the favorite part of my job. But you know I can—I don't have to think about what I'm going to be doing tomorrow because I know what I need to be doing tomorrow, the next day, next week, next month. I just know every day there's something that needs to be done, even if it's—like two weeks ago, you know, our cooking trailer, we've been hauling it around a good bit. And it's starting to take a toll on it, so I had to redo the floors. So me and--me and Scott went there and we tore our floor out and we changed our floor and put our freezers back in, all our stuff, and now we're ready to go.

01:06:14

But it's just there is never a day that we don't have to do something there. We always have something to get ready for or clean up or--or whatever. But we always have something to do.

01:06:27

SR: I'm going to wrap up here soon and let you go, but I forgot to ask you earlier about your mom. You were telling me before we started recording that your mom grew up—her parents had a boarding house. Is that how it was?

01:06:43

MC: Yeah, my mom—when my mom was a young girl, they had a boarding house that they would take care of. That's when the oil field pretty much started in Lafourche Parish, and--and it was a boarding house. So my mom had an eighth grade education, and then after that she had to stay home and--and help my grandmother cook for the people that was in the boarding house.

01:07:10

And so that's--that's where my grandmother was an awesome cook. And she did it until almost the day she died. And then, like I said, then her eldest son, Randolph, took over the restaurant—or he had the restaurant. And then--and then my mom got married and then just moved on. And that's how she got in the catering business. But we was—there was always—it revolved around food. Everything was about food in them days. You know just they were there to take care of the people that was in their boarding house.

01:07:46

SR: So the people who would be in the boarding house were oil field workers?

01:07:47

MC: Yes, ma'am, they sure were. That was the first--some of the first people that came down here to--to start drilling for oil in Leeville and Golden Meadow and places like that. But that's--that's where it pretty much started at. And they saw a need. They had a big house because they had a big family. They had a big family, and they had a place that they could sleep some of these people, and that's--that's what they did. You know they boarded these people and--and fed them. And that's how they made their living.

01:08:17

SR: What was your grandmother's name?

01:08:19

MC: Fredia. Fredia Collins. She was a—Collins is a big family. In fact the fellow I talked to you about before, Wilbert Collins—that was all related. Collins was a big family; you had your Collins and your Cheramies were—and Guidrys were--were really big families down here. And then, but that's what was my grandmother's name.

01:08:46

SR: Do you know the name of the boarding house?

01:08:49

MC: No, I don't, no. I really don't. We'll ask my mom on the way out. She's working in her yard right now. **[Laughs]**

01:08:58

SR: What about your kids? Do you see any of them carrying on the cooking tradition? I know you said your one daughter who lives—doesn't cook so much, but—.

01:09:10

MC: Yeah, Mark Philip, my youngest boy, he comes and helps me. He comes to help every--every now and then. His favorite dish is the hogshead cheese believe it or not. But when he—he would never eat that before, but when he found out we didn't make it with the hog's head, well he was okay with that. And we use Boston butts, and--and so one day we were cooking it; it was a couple years ago. We were cooking it at--at one of Mr. Magnus' friend's place in Larose and told him. He was going to come there and help us cook the hogshead cheese. He wasn't too happy about it. But he went there and when he seen we were cutting up these Boston butts he said, "What are y'all doing with that?" I said, "That's the hogshead cheese." He said, "Dad, are you kidding me?" I said, "No, I ain't kidding you."

01:09:50

And all they had in there was the bone off of the Boston butt itself, so we--we cut as much as we could up and then put the bones in there, and then he stirred and stirred and stirred. And then when it was ready, he said, "I think I'm going to try it." So--so he did, and he did like I said earlier, you take a French bread, you make a whole in the middle, and he poured it in there and he ate it.

01:10:14

So to this day, only when he knows that we're cooking a hogshead cheese, I'll bring some home. He don't eat it cold. He'll put it back in a pan on the stove or in a pot, and then he'll

melt it down and then he'll eat it like that. But he--he likes to cook. He does a little bit of cooking here and there, but that was his first experience with hogshead cheese. None of my other kids will eat it.

01:10:37

SR: That's a good story. When you're at home, who is the cook—you or your wife?

01:10:42

MC: My wife is a pretty good cook. She didn't start out as a good cook, but—when we first got married. And I'm going to tell you this story and I know you're going to laugh. I went—I left early one morning to go hunting and I killed three of the prettiest male mallards you ever seen; came there, took my time, cleaned them up, and she said, “Oh Babe, I'm going to cook them for you tonight.” I said, “Great.”

01:11:07

So that night I walked in. We were living in a trailer then, and [I] walked in the trailer thinking I was going to smell that awesome duck like when my mom cooks it in a black iron pot. Well I opened up the pot and she boiled them. She boiled these ducks. I said, “What [*Laughs*] you did to my ducks?” She said, “I cooked them.” So that was the last time she cooked my ducks. [*Laughs*] True story too; this is a true story.

01:11:32

SR: That's a good one. **[Laughs]** Well I think I'll--I'll end that there because that's a good story to end on. I really appreciate your time. It's great to get this different perspective about life on Bayou Lafourche.

01:11:48

MC: Well it's good meeting you again. Like I say, it's three years, maybe four years since-- since we met. So yeah, it's good seeing you again, and I promise you the next time we talk I'm going to have finished reading your book.

01:12:02

SR: No problem. Hopefully next time we talk you'll have something cooking. Thank you.

01:12:08

[End Mark Callais Interview]