

KERRY BOUTTE
Mulate's Restaurant—New Orleans, LA

Date: July 17, 2007
Location: Fulton Street—New Orleans, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 1 hour, 17 minutes
Project: Southern Gumbo Trail

[Begin Kerry Boutte Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Tuesday, July 17, 2007, and I'm in New Orleans, Louisiana on Fulton Street. If you don't mind, could you state your name and your birth date and how you make—or made—your living?

00:00:19

Kerry Boutte: Kerry Boutte from Arnaudville, Louisiana. Birthday is August 26, 1944. And I make my living in the Cajun restaurant business.

00:00:32

SR: How do you spell the name of the town where you're from?

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KB: It's Arnaudville--A-r-n-a-u-d-v-i-l-l-e; it's Arnaudville [spoken with a French pronunciation].

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SR: And where is that?

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KB: It's about 20 miles northeast of Lafayette. It's a little—very rural community, although it's becoming somewhat of a satellite community for Lafayette right now. It's a beautiful little town about 1,500--2,000 people with a great infrastructure. You know there was once a theater there; it's not—no longer there but it's the junction of Bayou Teche and Bayou Fuselier. It's a well-known little community there in the Acadiana area.

00:01:12

SR: When you were growing up did your family speak some sort of French dialect? It sounds like you have a little bit in there.

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KB: I do, I do; I still have a little bit of that and very proud of it and that makes me a real part of the Cajun culture, and yes... You know what my mother and father speak is like 16th Century or 17th Century French, which actually came from France, but being isolated in the swamps of Louisiana for a couple hundred years they developed their own somewhat—their own dialect and when they—when a new word came into their culture they used—either used a corruption or the English word. And so they speak French and English together simultaneously and it's—it's a wonderful thing for Cajuns because it's very funny when you inject an English word into a French conversation. You know it's really funny. But you know you can only get it if you're Cajun you know; so—.

00:02:10

SR: And did your daughter—I know that you have at least one daughter. Did she grow up in a household that had that?

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KB: No, she didn't. My first wife didn't speak French, and so you know we didn't really converse with it. Although I spoke French to my friends when they came over, it wasn't enough for her to get it. So you know I made her take French in college for a few years, and so she can actually go to France and—and speak a little French, you know, when she goes there; so—. But no we didn't do that and it's unfortunate. I think to some degree that will eventually wipe out the entire language, you know, because I—then again, you know you might still have little pockets in rural areas that keep it alive. You just don't know how long it's going to last, you know, but it could last longer than—than most people think.

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SR: And what about—do you know your parents' people, did they come to Louisiana directly from France—do you know—or from Nova Scotia or—or do you know their history at all?

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KB: Yeah. My father's parents came—they lived in New Iberia; they came through from France through New Orleans and then subsequently had gone into the New Iberia area. My parents came—my mother's side of the family came from Nova Scotia, one of the exiles from Nova Scotia, and so it's an interesting kind of, you know, combination of the exiles from Nova Scotia and those that came through New Orleans. It wasn't a family that was known for anything in

particular, you know; we—I think I’m the only one that really went into any kind of business that was significant I guess.

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SR: What did your parents do for a living when you were growing up?

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KB: My mother stayed at home but then she—I think when she got into her 50s—40s and 50s—she just kind of got bored, you know, being a housewife and so she started doing catering and she had a little restaurant at one time called the Teche Drive-In Restaurant, and she did crawfish étouffée and hamburgers and fried baby red snappers and all kinds of interesting things. She was—she was a really renowned Cajun—I mean a real Cajun cook in Arnaudville. And she did a lot of catering and she was well known for—for you know, catering; so—. She was a character also. You know she was a real character.

00:05:14

SR: In what kind of way?

00:05:13

KB: Well she was a kind of, you know, always laughing and having fun and gossiping and

[Laughs]—just sort of a very flamboyant woman, you know.

00:05:32

SR: What about your father? What did he do for a living?

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KB: My dad worked in the oil field—oil field business you know. He was a roughneck and then he was a driller and then he retired and started taking care of wells throughout the Southern Acadiana area.

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SR: How many kids were in your family?

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KB: Four. I had an older brother who was a natural artist that chose to be an automatic transmission mechanic; an older who—they both died—who I loved dearly, who stayed home with her husband and raised her kids and was very content with just being a housewife forever. She had no ambition to do anything else and that was fine with me. And I have a younger sister who lives in Lafayette; we don't see each other very much but we should see each other more than we do.

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SR: In your household—so your mom did all the cooking?

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KB: Yeah, my mom did all the cooking you know. In Acadiana, you know, a lot of men cook, and my dad can [*Emphasis Added*] cook—well he could cook—but he, I don't think he liked it. I

think he preferred to have my mother cook because my mother was such a fantastic cook. But he could—you know he could cook but he didn't do it very well; he didn't do it very much.

00:06:59

SR: What kind of—I'm assuming your mom made gumbo?

00:07:02

KB: Yeah, yeah. Well you know that's an interesting—the interesting thing—I have tried to find out where dark roux comes from. I know roux comes from France, I think: it's oil and flour. But the dark roux is sort of a mystery to me. Who—you know, who is the first one to do a dark roux? And I'm still researching that trying to find out. Anyway, the Cajun gumbo, you know I think—I think it happened by accident one day, you know, when somebody was doing a light roux with flour and oil and accidentally cooked it too much and decided they were going to put it into water and put some chickens and sausage in it and make a gumbo, you know, because how else would they have done it—you know what I mean? It had to be sort of an accident. But you know it—the Cajun gumbo is pretty much roux and stock water and—and just about anything **[Laughs]** you can imagine in it, you know. Let's take—you could have like a rabbit and sausage gumbo or a duck and andouille gumbo or a chicken and sausage gumbo or a seafood gumbo and okra gumbo, and the list goes on and on. They were like, you know, there are tons of ways to make this but traditionally in Louisiana—in Acadiana where I'm from, it was a kind of soupy, brothy, roux, water, stock...So it had a lot of flavor, you know, and the chicken was just sort of boiled in—the chicken and the sausage boiled into it—into this mixture. In New Orleans—I

think the way to express the difference between Cajun and Creole gumbo is it's a little more sophisticated. You know they use—they don't use as much roux.

00:08:58

SR: In New Orleans they don't?

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KB: Yeah, in New Orleans. They use bay leaf and some use thyme, some use oregano. You know those are the spices that—that New Orleans has pretty much identified with, and of course a lot of okra. You know all their gumbos have okra and they're really good, you know. Once again it's like you—you look for *what is the best?* because they're all different in New Orleans, you know: the same Creole gumbo is different every place you go. I personally like Praline Connection; I like the flavor of it and it is—I guess it's because it's more like a Cajun gumbo there. They call it filé gumbo and we did too back home. I don't know; it's just got—it's got a really, really nice flavor. I love it. I just like it you know. It's my kind of gumbo.

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SR: So when you were growing up, your mom never used okra or bay leaf or thyme?

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KB: She would make an okra gumbo this way: she would, you know, get—go buy the okra in the fields [*Laughs*] and cut it up and start cooking it with onion and a little tomato and a little salt and pepper and cook it down for a long time until it almost starts to actually brown. And then

add a little stock water and shrimp, and so it was—basically what we grew up with was shrimp and okra gumbo—shrimp and okra gumbo. That was just like a classic thing there.

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SR: And did that—but that didn't have roux or filé in it?

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KB: It did not have roux—it did not have roux. You know there—my sister would put like just a little teaspoon full of roux when she was—when she made hers but my mother didn't; she didn't put roux at all. It was just okra cooked down with water. You could use a little—you could use a little chicken stock water or just regular water, because when you put the shrimp in that's when it really gives it the flavor, you know.

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SR: And did she put—but that wasn't the filé gumbo?

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KB: That's not the filé gumbo. The filé gumbo is just—as I know it, it's just stocky—roux, water, stock, sausage, chicken, you know, a brothy kind of thing. That's what a filé gumbo is, and of course filé refers to sassafras, you know, and that's the ground up sassafras and they—in New Orleans it's really interesting. In New Orleans they use it in—they put it in while they're cooking the gumbo. In Acadiana where I'm from we use it as a kind of—we just kind of dust it over the top. We serve our bowl of gumbo and then just dust it over the top of our gumbo and

that's the way we did it, but New Orleans cooks it in the gumbo. So it was kind of an interesting—and you know they put their rice in their gumbo while they're—you know, before they serve it to you, and in Acadiana we always have the rice on the side. It's kind of a traditional little thing we do.

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SR: And then you put the rice in yourself?

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KB: You put the rice—you put as much rice as you want. Some people like a lot of rice and some people don't like—you know they like a little bit of rice. It's a cool little tradition that we have here.

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SR: So when you're putting your filé—when you're sprinkling it on top of the gumbo, are you doing that as a seasoning or as a thickener?

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KB: Oh it's just as a seasoning. It gives it a nice little, nice little smell and flavor you know. It's just very subtle but you know it's really—but when you put it on you can smell it you know and it's beautiful.

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SR: What does it smell like? Can you compare it to anything?

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KB: It's aromatic. You know it's—to me it's aromatic. It's almost like a perfume except it would be like an herbal perfume maybe or something like that you know. I really like the smell; I mean it's like, to me, I can smell it right now as we're speaking, you know because it's a wonderful—just like, you know, dust your hand over the bowl and smell it. Oh God, it's a beautiful thing; it's making me hungry.

00:13:40

SR: When you—me too! When you were growing up. where did you get the filé? Was it in the supermarket or would you—?

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KB: It was in the supermarket and now you can actually—there's some guys over at the fresh markets here who actually pound it out with a big mortar and—a big mortar and pestle, you know. So but yeah; I don't know if I—yeah, I believe anything that's done that way is probably better, but when you're talking about simply just pulverized sassafras, you know I'm not sure if it would be better at the market or better at the supermarket, you know. I don't know. I think they're probably the same.

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SR: But you didn't have people in your community doing that?

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KB: No, not in our community, but I think in New Orleans they had it, but not back in Acadiana.

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SR: So when your mom made a roux, what color was it?

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KB: I would say a little darker than peanut butter you know. It's hard to—it's more—a little darker; it kind of turns into a kind of a peanut buttery kind of thing, you know, when you're cooking it and it gets to that peanut butter color and you can stop it there or you can—it's like grease of—*[Laughs]* it's like, I don't know. It's hard to stop a roux, you know what I mean? It's like—you don't know exactly when it's brown enough, you know. I think I know but I'm always challenging myself because it's not always exactly right, and of course if you want it to stop cooking—when you get it to a particular temperature and you want it to stop cooking—you either put it into the water while the water is boiling or you have to put ice on it, on the bottom, so it doesn't continue to cook, because if it—it will get too brown, you know.

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SR: Oh so you—I guess the way I learned, you know, just fairly recently wasn't from my mom or anything. It was—you would throw in your seasoning vegetables to stop it from cooking. But you would put ice on it?

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KB: It [just adding seasoning vegetables to the cooking roux] doesn't stop it—it doesn't really stop it. I like—I mean I do it myself, you know, put my onions and bell pepper into—and it really does sort of marry into the whole thing and makes it better, but it doesn't really stop it. It cooks it, but it [the roux] really needs to kind of like get in, you know, in some ice or in some water, you know, just to stop it from—. And it depends on you know—it's like if I like a dark roux, I don't want it darker than what I—what I stopped it at, and so I either have to put it right in the water then, or cool it down so it doesn't get too dark.

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SR: What kind of fat would your mom use making her roux?

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KB: She would make it sometimes with Crisco oil, which is a vegetable oil, but it had a different taste. She would, you know, do this every now and then but it was—generally it was like cotton seed oil that she used; she always did like cotton seed oil, and it had a pretty good taste. You know just all the oils have different tastes, so it was generally cotton seed oil and Crisco oil but—and it gave the gumbos different tastes; totally different tastes.

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SR: What about you? What do you use?

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KB: I use peanut oil but I would use—I would use cotton seed oil if it was more available. I like the flavor of cotton seed oil. The restaurants back home when I was growing up, that's what they used and I sort of got acclimated to that taste I guess. I really liked that taste.

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SR: Is cotton seed oil available?

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KB: Well it was. We used to get it through Lou Ana out of Opelousas, Louisiana, but I haven't seen any on the shelf anymore. I see a lot of peanut oil they do, but I don't know about—I don't know where the cotton seed oil is.

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SR: And if you're making—we'll talk about your restaurant soon, but if you're just making gumbo at home, do you—what color do you get your roux to? Is it similar to your mom's?

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KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's—yeah I mean every—you know most everything I like today, I judge the quality of it by thinking back to how my mother cooked it because she was that good; you know everything—it's like I judge everything that I cook by sort of remembering back how my mother did it and what it tasted like, you know. The mind—what would you call that? You know it's like the mind's eye but the mind's taste-buds, or whatever. How does that work, huh?

[Laughs]

00:18:57

SR: Did you know when you were growing up that she was a good cook?

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KB: Oh, I mean I didn't—I guess I took it for granted. I guess I took it for granted, but she was just such—I mean she'd cook at least twice a day, you know lunch and dinner—at least twice a day everyday. You know it was always something; everything she cooked was wonderful, and she just did it simple but she just had a knack, just an incredible knack, which I do not have. She—she was one of a kind in that area, boy. She was so good. Hmm.

00:19:33

SR: And where did she learn to cook?

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KB: Oh she probably had, you know influences, before I was—you know, before I was ever around. I think it was probably just—I mean it was something that women did in those days: they took care of their men and they did the cooking, and I think they probably just traded off secrets and recipes amongst each other, you know, when they were growing up because she never—she never did really use a recipe book. You know she always just kind of did it, you know, and that's kind of the way I do it too. I wish I'd learn a little more discipline there and write my recipes down because every time I cook something I feel like I'm challenging myself to do better, or whatever, from the previous one. And for me that works, you know; I can do it. I don't always—

you know I guess I'm about a 90-percent guy: 90-percent of the time it's good and 10-percent, you know, it's not good.

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SR: What kind of pot would your mom make her gumbo in?

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KB: She'd use—she'd use aluminum, an aluminum pot—very cheap, you know, kind of a little short stock pot. She just—I mean you know we're sitting here talking and I'm thinking that, I mean I truly can remember the sights and smells; I have them in my head. You know, right now, it's beautiful. And so every time I really—every time I eat something that my mother cooked I always reflect back and think about *well how did she do that?* and *what did it taste like?* And so I compare it to everything that I eat today; it's like an obsession almost, you know. But you know, I think fundamentally to know what's good, what kind of food is actually good or is it really good, you have to have grown up with someone who really did cook good food. There are a lot of kids that grew up whose parents—mothers and fathers—really couldn't cook very well, and so they had no basis for opinions about food other than what they've learned in restaurants or watching the Food Channel [Network], you know. They didn't have the real experience like I think I did, you know.

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SR: Well, that inspired you to go into the restaurant business?

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KB: I worked with—my mother had a little restaurant in Arnaudville, Louisiana, there for about 10 years and—**[interruption]**

00:22:39

SR: Okay, so we'll pick up where we left off. So you said that you worked with your mom at her restaurant for a while?

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KB: Yeah, I worked with my mom and once again she was making—she was making crawfish bisque, you know, which is something that my mother was an absolute expert at and something you really can't find in the really old traditional way that it was done. I mean you find it in restaurants but it's a short cut, you know what I mean; it's—it's just not what my mother—. To start with, you know, live crawfish and boil them and peel them and clean the heads and the fat and the whole thing. That's the way she made it, you know, and it was just fantastic. And anyway I—I worked with her for I guess two or three years, and then I went into the military, and then I got out and I became a butcher. And I actually opened a meat market in Morgan City, kind of a service thing with a deli and—and then the meat market didn't make it you know. It's just I didn't have enough expertise; I didn't have, you know—it had potential but it just didn't make it, and so I closed it and went to work for Don's Seafood in Morgan City. And you know for like \$100 a week, so just kind of learning—starting to learn the business and how a restaurant worked; *how does that work?* You know what I mean? And then started actually applying some of the skills that I had learned from my mother but never actually performed because I didn't—I

wasn't a big cook at that time, you know, and so I started you know dabbling in it. And once again, I'm not a chef; I'm—I can barely cook, but it's some things that I cook really good, you know. And so I learned all the aspects of the restaurant business from—from the actual preparation to the fry cook to the broiler cook to the gumbo man to whatever, you know—whatever it took; the expediter or whatever it took, and that's where I started to learn the business and how the business operated. And then I worked with them for a number of years and then find—you know found an opportunity—. Well I was kind of down on my luck, I would say, in 1979. I had an idea in my head and the idea was a Cajun restaurant. I felt like you know I—you know I looked at New Orleans and said *What does New Orleans have that Cajuns don't have?* New Orleans has, you know, its own music: birthplace of Jazz. It has its own food, you know. And it has a culture, and I thought well Cajuns—you know, we have our own music, we have our own food, we have our own language, so we actually had more in a way than they had, you know. And so I thought that that's what I wanted to do, was to have a restaurant that reflected all that in a very casual way. It's like a fais do-do, except it's a restaurant and not a nightclub, you know what I mean?

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SR: Can I just pause here for a second; can you explain what a fais do-do is?

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KB: A fais do-do is an expression for a dance—like a dance at a dancehall where families would go and the little kids would, you know, about 9 o'clock at night start to get a little tired, so they would pull a couple of chairs together or they'd put the little kid on a bench and they would

go like, “*fais do-do, fais do-do,*” which means “go to sleep, go to sleep.” And so you would see them—in fact you’d see them in my place occasionally, where they got a couple and there’s a little baby—a little girl, a little boy—you know, laid out on a chair or a bench or something. And so that—it’s really like, to me it’s everything that the culture is all about, you know, my place, and I’m very proud of that: the fact that it embodies all of those things that are Cajun. I mean when people—when tourists come, they come, you know, all the time; they’ve been coming for years and years and years. I mean they love the music, the dancing; they love the friendly atmosphere, you know. It’s just an infectious kind of thing that people just fall in love with when they see it. I mean from little bitty kids, you know, to 90 year-old people—they just love it. I mean you see little bitty kids that can barely walk on the dance floor jumping up and down trying to dance, you know. It’s a beautiful thing to see a grandfather dancing with his grandchild or a dad dancing with his little girl; it’s just a beautiful thing and I’m so very fortunate that I created a business that does that—it gives so much more than a plate of food, you know.

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SR: So in the beginning when you first opened it, well—well can you tell the story? Because I know when you first opened the place it wasn’t as big as it is now, and it was in Breaux Bridge.

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KB: Right, it was in Breaux Bridge. It was, you know, if you’ve been there recently it would be like a—it would be like a third or maybe a fourth; the original place was a third or fourth of what you see now when you go in there. There’s about 10,000 square-feet there now, and so I’m thinking it was more—no more than 2,500 square feet in the beginning. Ten tables and a staff of

four people—five people. Myself, one cook in the kitchen who I had to train, two waitresses and a busboy who was also the dishwasher. And I remember the first day I was in business—and I really had to get in there and clean it out and put some organization to it and design a menu and all that kind of stuff. But when I finally opened, the first day I opened you know I was ready, boy; I mean I had prepared all—you know, and my stuff was really good, and it was two customers and they came in I think by accident, because they opened the door and went—they went like, *Is this a restaurant?* And I said *Yeah, come on in.* So my theory was, in all honesty—and I was fairly naïve in those days. It wasn't like I really had premeditated plan or anything but I thought to myself, *You know what? I'm going to make those two people really happy and they're going to leave here—because they work around her—they're going to leave here and they're going to go tell 10 people.* And I swear to God that's the way it started, you know. All of the sudden there were 10 people and those 10 people were telling another 10 people and then all of the sudden it's packed, you know what I mean? 'Cause it was good and it—the price was reasonable and everything. And then I got the idea of doing—because you know the place was—well here's the real story. Well I started playing music shortly after I, you know opened the restaurant—I would say a few months after I opened the restaurant I started playing music. The first night I played music, I played Zachary Richard and nobody came. And then I started playing BeauSoleil, who have become very, very famous in the world. And it was the beginning of putting the whole concept together, and you know there were a lot of elements—like you know, the band would play but nobody would dance and all of the sudden somebody started dancing, you know and—and it just started to happen. And it went from one day a week to two days a week to three days a week 'til eventually seven days a week. We were playing live Cajun music for lunch and dinner. But you know in 1983—in 1983 I learned from the Tourist Commission

that there was going to be this big influx of media coming into New Orleans for the World's Fair. And so—and they were looking for not only things to do in New Orleans, but if people wanted to do excursions outside the city to discover more in Louisiana and whatnot. So I extended an invitation through the Tourist Commission to anybody I could find to come to me and I would show them what real Cajuns were and what real Cajun music—what food was all about. Almost—because this was happening so fast, the World's Fair thing was happening so fast—almost within a couple of weeks, you know a German film crew shows up and they do a documentary and the next day it appeared—a story appeared in the paper but they didn't have our name. They had a picture of the band but they didn't say our name, and so I went and I got the sign that was on the front end of the building, took it off, and put it on the back of the bandstand. **[Laughs]** It was like people—and I said every time they take a picture from now on, they'll know where it came from, you know and so—. But you know the travel writers, the documentary people, you know the—all kinds of people just came. They started coming and it was like movie stars and, I mean it's just like the in the '80s, it was phenomenal. It was always something happening every night, you know. It was just such a powerful thing. It just kind of took on a life of its own. You know what I mean? **[Laughs]** And I spent a lot of money in those days just making sure that the world heard the word *Cajun*, and if I got—if I could have just a little bit more, would they associate that with me, Mulate's? You know what I mean? And that's what I always did; just like I don't care what they were saying. Generally, 99.9-percent of the time they were saying good, positive things about Cajun, whereas before they never did, you know. But you know I just wanted to get the name out. I wanted to be world-famous you know—not locally famous; I just wanted to be world-famous, you know, and so I did things where I'd entertain people from Russia or something, or from Japan, and people would go like—they

would think I was nuts because I never was going to reap the benefits of—you know, picking up their ticket or whatever. But for me, yes I did. And I mean I do today—there are people that come from Japan, Australia, all over the world, you know, hearing about me from somewhere in their country. You know what I mean? So it's—it's—**[Laughs]** you know, I was just really, really fortunate and very proud really of what I accomplished there. I—you know, I am not an educated guy, so I don't have any skills in management and handling money and I'm the worst at that, you know. People think I'm a businessman and I'm not, you know. I mean it's really hard for me. I just don't have that kind of mind, but creative—I have a creative mind, but I mean just to get down with a pencil or a typewriter or—I just can't do that.

00:34:26

SR: Well how did you do that in the early days?

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KB: Well in the early days it was just trial and error and I got a lot of money stolen from me and, you know I just made a lot of bad mistakes just not knowing what to do—just hiring, you know the guy right standing next to me. *Oh you want to work for me? Come on.* You know, but now my daughter—since my daughter has been there, I mean it's—oh God, a much higher level of professionalism in terms of hiring and firing and dealing with the people, and you know dealing with all the needs of the restaurant everyday. I mean she and her husband, Murphy—Monique and Murphy—are just, they're phenomenal. And I created a trust for my daughter, because you know my daughter I adore, and not only that she's a very vital part of my business, you know—so she and I—. It was me—I owned everything—and I created a trust, and so she

and I own it, although I'm the director of the trust. She inherits everything when I die, which is a great thing you know. That's the way I want it to work. Not only do I adore my daughter, but you know I'm thrilled with her professionalism in running the restaurant, and her dedication.

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SR: And so well just to back up a little bit. You opened Mulate's in Breaux Bridge in 1980.

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KB: Right.

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SR: Your daughter now runs a restaurant, Mulate's, in New Orleans.

00:35:53

KB: Right, right. She's—the original one in Breaux Bridge was part of a divorce settlement. I own the national trademark and she [Kerry's ex-wife] has a license for me to use the name, so we try to, you know—try to operate under the same rules and regulations, you know. I had one in Baton Rouge for 14 years, and it did well in Baton Rouge for about 10 years and then the last four years we just couldn't get the right kind of management or, you know and it just—it didn't make any money so we turned it over to our manager who had been with us for 14 years, who always wanted to open his restaurant. He simply took all the signs down and did the same thing basically, and you know it's—it was good with us; it was fine with us you know.

00:36:43

SR: In the early days at the original location what was—what was your early menu like?

00:36:52

KB: The early menu, oddly enough, so resembles the menu today at the restaurant you know. It was like seafood platter, which was a frog leg, two shrimp, two oysters, a really good stuffed crab that I have—you know I was really good at that—and a piece of fried catfish and some jambalaya. And of course fried catfish and grilled catfish and fried oysters and gumbo. Those kinds of basic things that all the restaurants in that area serve, you know; it wasn't anything unusual. It was like I wanted to cater to the people. I didn't want to try to get fancy, and I wanted—I wanted to cook something that they went—that they liked to eat. They loved seafood platters and stuff, and you know so that was like—they had to go out at least once or twice a week to get a seafood platter somewhere. I just made sure that, you know, it was fresh and good—you know it was as fresh as it could possibly be and cooked in good fresh oil.

00:37:58

SR: What kind of gumbo did you serve in the beginning?

00:38:02

KB: Seafood gumbo. Once again it's that brothy water and roux, onion—a little onion, a little bell pepper, a little salt, a little cayenne red pepper. And then when you put—when you put the seafood in that water, it gives it the flavor. You know and—put a few green onions in there and you eat it with rice.

00:38:25

SR: Do Cajuns use celery in their gumbo?

00:38:30

KB: Not that I know of. I mean some of them might but not—where we come from. It's like, *Celery? You've got to be kidding.* But then again, you know you might go to another area and they go *What? Of course we put celery in our gumbo,* you know, but we never would. Oh my God, that would be like—. [*Laughs*]

00:38:52

SR: What about—so you also have another gumbo on the menu. Is it called Zydeco gumbo?

00:38:59

KB: Yeah, yeah. That was, you know being that—honest to God the people from New Orleans do not like Cajun gumbo. Cajuns do not like New Orleans gumbo. Because they're very different, you know and like the Cajuns go *I don't like New Orleans gumbo because it's too thick,* you know, and then the guy from New Orleans will go, like, *Man that Cajun gumbo is too watery.* You know what I mean? So I try to—I didn't want to abandon my style of gumbo because I couldn't, because my concept is Cajun so I have to cook as close as I can, but I had to compromise in the gumbo and make it different. It's between Cajun gumbo and Creole gumbo. It really is kind of between that you know.

00:39:54

SR: The Zydeco gumbo, you mean?

00:39:54

KB: The Zydeco gumbo.

00:39:55

SR: And—and what's in there?

00:39:59

KB: You know I'll have to get back with you on that.

00:40:05

SR: Okay.

00:40:05

KB: Because—

00:40:08

SR: Been a while?

00:40:08

KB: Yeah, it's been a while and I need to—we can find out. My cook in the kitchen, he kind of—we kind of sort of collaborated about the gumbo you know. But I'm not sure ultimately what—there's okra in it.

00:40:36

SR: So is the Zydeco gumbo only in the—at the New Orleans restaurant?

00:40:41

KB: Ah—

00:40:42

SR: Or you might not know that either, but did you—did you start doing that for New Orleanians in Breaux Bridge, or did you start that here?

00:40:48

KB: Here, yeah here, and we also have a seafood gumbo just—you know pretty close to what we used to do back in the restaurant in Breaux Bridge. You know it's a kind of a brothy, with you know—with a lot of seafood in it, crawfish, shrimp, oyster—that kind of thing.

00:41:10

SR: What about when—last year some Southern Foodways Alliance members and volunteers who were working on [restoring] Willie Mae's Scotch House ate here [downstairs] at Mulate's

and you made a special gumbo for us. I don't know if you remember, but I think it was duck and andouille.

00:41:29

KB: Uh-hm.

00:41:31

SR: Did you grow up eating much game like duck or—?

00:41:35

KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, like various kinds of birds, you know, it was like [*Laughs*]*—*it was like doves, you know, bless their hearts—sweet little doves. We'd make a roti. It was like you'd clean the doves, you know whole; salt and red pepper; and you'd start out with onions and bell pepper, right, and you kind of sauté that down, and you brown your birds, and you add a little stock, and you just simmer that for about an hour and a half—you know what I mean? And it just makes this wonderful gravy. You know one thing Cajuns should be more recognized for is their gravies—their gravies, man. You know what I mean? There's a sauce and there's a gravy. Cajuns can make gravy, you know what I mean? I can make a pretty good gravy, but there are so many of them that are way better than me, you know. They are—that's an art making a gravy, you know making a gravy; that's an art man, you know.

00:42:45

SR: You were saying when we were talking earlier that—I think you were saying that like the sort of quintessential what—what you grew up eating, and what Cajuns eat, is gravy and rice dishes?

00:42:59

KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean we had rice and gravy almost everyday you know, and I love it.

[Emphasis Added] You know it was—it was good constitutionally; it was just good, you know.

It was like chicken étouffée, steak étouffée, pork chop étouffée, crawfish étouffée. **[Laughs]**

00:43:22

SR: What does *étouffée* mean to you?

00:43:24

KB: Smothered... smothered. You—like you brown everything and you put your, you know your onions, and then you start cooking it like in the gravy, and then you've got to put the lid on with a little crack in the top of the pot just to kind of like vent a little bit of the steam. And that kind of almost bakes it, you know what I mean; in a way it's like baking hen in its gravy. You know what I mean? But that's all like—Willie Mae's Scotch House. Is Willie Mae's, open by the way? I gave her a fryer—.

00:43:55

SR: Uh-hm.

00:43:56

KB: She is? I sent her over a brand new fryer and—a deep fat fryer and some chairs for her bar.

00:44:08

SR: She's open; I don't know that she's cooking.

00:44:11

KB: Oh boy. I mean the smothered veal—*[Laughs]* oh my God, you know. I was thinking about that the other day and telling my wife. I'm just like, you know my mouth was watering. That's—that smothered veal is just fantastic, man.

00:44:32

SR: I agree. I've had that also. And she's from Mississippi.

00:44:35

KB: Oh and her fried chicken *[Emphasis Added]* and her wonderful spirit.

00:44:41

SR: I know, I know. It's a real coup that they—tshat they're open.

00:44:46

KB: Oh who was the guy that was really sort of spearheading that whole thing? It was one guy.

00:44:55

SR: Oh, John Currence?

00:44:56

KB: Yeah, yeah. I mean there were a whole bunch of volunteers and it's just remarkable that they were able to, you know, do this as if sort of a monument that—you know, hopefully somebody in her family, somebody's going to be able to know the recipes and, you know, work hard. The only thing is I would have designed it a little bit differently; I would have made the, made it—well of course they had the bar as well, too. Did they air-condition that place?

00:45:24

SR: I think there—you mean did they put in, like, central [air]?

00:45:29

KB: Yeah.

00:45:30

SR: I think they did.

00:45:33

KB: I hope so. It was like an oven in there, man. *[Laughs]*

00:45:35

SR: Yeah, I'm pretty sure they did. I need to get over there.

00:45:39

KB: It's like you've got a fan blowing around hot air. *[Laughs]*

00:45:43

SR: I need to get there on this trip because it's opened since the last time I was here.

00:45:48

KB: Yeah, I need to go. God, yeah, I mean you know I remember when we—my wife and I came here about four weeks after the storm—five weeks after the storm—and about six weeks after we were riding around and we see Miss Willie Mae, you know. *Honey, what's going on—I'm trying*—[she said], and it flooded there [in Willie Mae's neighborhood], you know, and it was like *Oh my God*, you know. And so we started inquiring. We didn't really do anything but we did inquire and we told her we'd give her whatever we could, and we did not really realize the extent that the project became, you know. But we—but you know she's saying *Oh you're so nice*. And I said well, God I mean—you know we just—we just want to see you kind of get back, you know, and we'll do what we have to do. So we gave her a nice brand new fryer and some stools, and if there's anything else—there's so many people involved, you know, that it almost became insignificant but—.

00:46:48

SR: No, that's [not insignificant]. I didn't know that you did that.

00:46:52

KB: Yeah.

00:46:55

SR: That's great. That's the way that things are coming back.

00:46:56

KB: Yeah.

00:46:56

SR: The community—the community pitching in.

00:47:01

KB: Yeah, it's—

00:47:01

SR: Well speaking of Willie Mae, that makes me think of something that you said about yourself. I mean Willie Mae, she wasn't a classically trained chef or anything. You said you weren't a chef, but it seems like—I mean why don't you consider yourself a chef? I mean, you have this legacy that's all about food?

00:47:22

KB: Well because I'm not really a chef. A chef embodies someone who knows how to make sauces, and it's a very extensive thing, and I have no idea. I mean all I do is really kind of just try to interpret, you know, my own cultural food and if I see something I think I might like—it's generally something very simple, like I was telling you about, you know, the salsa; you know, cooking the drum [fish] in the salsa. That's just something that just kind of came to me, but that's not—it's not really—you can't consider yourself a chef even if you create a couple little dishes that are, you know—. I mean I guess I—if I had learned the technical aspects of it, I mean like historical and really technical aspects of being a chef, I guess I could have. I did have a—I do have actually a dish that I created that's been on a menu at Landry's Seafood. Are you familiar with Landry's?

00:48:23

SR: Uh-hm.

00:48:26

KB: Well there's a dish that's called—and this is the honest to God truth—there's a dish called Oysters Landry. I created it. [*Laughs*] I created Oysters Landry. Let's see, I would say it would be like 1976. It's a long story, trust me. I created that dish and it's been on this guy's menu for 30 years.

00:48:50

SR: What is it? What's the preparation?

00:48:54

KB: It's like—it's an oyster on a half shell with some crabmeat and like a cheese sauce and some cheese on top, and you bake it in the oven you know. It's beautiful and it really is good; it's very simple. You know it's very simple, but it's been on that menu forever—for 30 years. It is certified me that did it.

00:49:19

SR: Where does the name Mulate's come from?

00:49:23

KB: Ugh--

00:49:30

SR: Okay, so it's a Cajun name?

00:49:32

KB: Yeah, yeah. It's a Cajun name.

00:49:34

SR: [*Laughs*] We'll leave it at that. And so at what point did your daughter get involved in the restaurant? Did she—was she involved in Breaux Bridge or—? I'm not sure how old she was.

00:49:43

KB: She worked for a while in the restaurant in Baton Rouge and I had been plagued, once again—you know, not having any real knowledge about management or finance or anything, I just—I just trusted people. And you know it almost destroyed me: the actual stealing and just, you know, poor management, pitiful management, and in 1990—I'm thinking 1990-what? '96--'97, something like that. I was almost bankrupt, you know because it appears as though it was almost sabotage. When I finally fired the guy who was running the place I was hit with like seven lawsuits, you know, for payment and stuff that he hadn't been paying. You know he had went to Rubenstein's and bought himself \$30,000 of nice suits, and then he went to Hurwitz-Mintz and bought him some furniture for his house. And literally, I mean we were in serious trouble, and so I called my daughter and she came that very day, and she had one semester left to graduate. And we just started from there, you know, and picking up the pieces, and it took four years to get out of it but you know eventually we did and then—and then we started making money. **[Laughs]** And we finally started making money. I mean we were making like—we ran huge sales, but there was never any money, you know—never any money. It was like—I mean it was just pathetic, and it was all a reflection of me that I was so incapable of doing that—that I didn't know what to tell them to do, you know. I mean that was—I think that the power of what this place has become really helped it to survive through those very bad years, but now it's like better than ever. You know my daughter and my son-in-law really have the food program together, and they stay on top of it. And they realize the concept—the total concept—is important, and the music and the dancing and whatnot but the—ultimately you're judged by really the food. And so they're really on top of that, and you know each day we try to get better—just the simple things we do. We want to make sure that those simple things are just the best they can possibly be, you know.

00:52:31

SR: Is your son-in-law—so he runs the kitchen end of things? Is he—?

00:52:35

KB: Well he actually does the purchasing; he pretty much—he's the backend guy, you know. He's not too visible in the front, but he really does a great job of you know staying on top of the inventory and keeping all the security measures in place and whatnot. He really does—he does a very, very important job. And my daughter—but he has no skills with people, you know what I mean? My daughter is the one who has that, so it's a great combination.

00:53:08

SR: This might be more of a question for them, but if you—if you know, you can answer it. Is it a challenge to find people in New Orleans who can cook to the Cajun flavors?

00:53:16

KB: Well you know we have a guy we call a cook—and I refuse to call him a chef because you know I don't want him to get a big head. He's not really a chef; he's a cook, you know. **[Laughs]** And he simply produces the recipes that we have everyday, you know what I mean, and it's always done the same way everyday. But you know we're the ones who directed him as to how to do something so that it reflects the Cajun culture. You know like in New Orleans, you know there's a lot of thyme, a lot of oregano, a lot of bay leaf—those kinds of things that we don't use. That's New Orleans, see, that's why we try to make that separation. Like we make a a brown

jambalaya, which is really good; it's different from the red jambalayas, you know, that they traditionally make and so you know we try as best we can to stick to our—the true Cajun cultural food and not cave into the whole New Orleans appetite for, you know, their traditional dishes.

You know what I mean?

00:54:38

SR: So this is maybe opening up a whole can of worms, but I'd be interested to know how you relate to Paul Prudhomme as a Cajun cook.

00:54:51

KB: Well Paul Prudhomme, I mean you can't deny it. I mean he truly made Cajun food famous. There's no question about it. You know we have—in Acadiana it's like if you go to France there are probably 30 or 40 different dialects because they come from all these different little regions and they have their own little way, and their own little way they talk and all the other things. Well back in Acadiana, it's the same thing: all of these little towns in Acadiana have their own way of cooking something. They're all kind of a little bit different, you know, and Paul is from Opelousas and I'm only 15--17 miles down the road in Arnaudville, right. But those two places cook things different—you know what I mean? So the way he cooks is different from the way I grew up cooking it—and only 17 miles apart. But then you go to Erath, you know, that's different, and then you go to New Iberia and it's different over there—just a little bit different, you know what I mean. **[Laughs]** So that's something, I don't think people really recognize the fact—the difference, and of course you know like the French dialect is different in one place than

the other; just a little—little bitty things that are different, you know. But I forgot where I was going with that.

00:56:14

SR: Well I was asking you about Paul Prudhomme.

00:56:15

KB: Oh yeah, yeah, Paul. You know I guess he's the one who coined the phrase—I don't know if it was him or if it was you know somebody from the press or some—or a bus boy who said *That's blackened*—you know what I mean? I think he takes credit for it, but I'd like to go back to the actual person that did it, you know. If in fact he did it, then bravo, you know what I mean? But a lot of people are exploited that way, where they'll come up with an idea and somebody will steal it and—you know what I mean. But it has certainly become [that] *blackened redfish* [is] synonymous with *Cajun*. And for a number of years I didn't want to do it because I thought it was a hokey thing but then realized, you know what? It's got—you know, it's become legitimate. It's become legitimate, and so I caved in and said *I was wrong* and put it on the menu. And it's [redfish] just hard to find, you know. You can't—you can barely get it anymore.

00:57:16

SR: The redfish you mean?

00:57:17

KB: Yeah, yeah; it's a great thing you know. It's just that you can't find it anymore. And so you know that's—to me once again it's like his fame—and you know his restaurant says Paul Prudhomme's Louisiana Kitchen. It doesn't say anything about Cajun, right? But to me it's like they all, in the press they always refer to him as a Cajun chef, and that's to me what I wanted the world to hear: Cajun—Cajun; what's a Cajun, you know what I mean. And in order for them, when they were traveling to America, to have some kind of...attempt at fame that would bring them to us, you know. So anyway, so I think Paul is a really good chef you know. I think he's better now than he's ever been. He's done a lot of great things for our State, for the Cajun culture.

00:58:19

SR: When you eat—well, assuming that you've eaten at his restaurant ever or eaten his food—did/does it taste familiar or not?

00:58:30

KB: Not really.

00:58:31

SR: I mean familiar--

00:58:32

KB: Not really. You know he's way more into cooking than I am and so he's, you know I guess he takes things to—you know like Emeril takes things to pump it up, or whatever he says—you

know he takes it to another level, literally, and gets to—it gets to a foot-tall on the plate.

[Laughs] So for me, I mean it's hard for me to actually talk about other chefs because I simply like a fresh piece of fish or a good piece of meat and some potatoes, you know: simple things. I don't really like sauces very much. I like gravy, but I don't like sauces very much.

00:59:25

SR: Yeah, I was just curious. I mean I know that—I think it seems to me that he actually—Paul Prudhomme actually makes a point of saying a lot of times that his food isn't necessarily Cajun, but you know he is perceived that way and so I was just wondering.

00:59:38

KB: Well it was important for me that he was perceived that way because of his fame and so that you know—that *Paul Prudhomme* and *Cajun* was simultaneously said together—you know what I mean; it was like Cajun, Cajun, Cajun. And yeah; but—we were talking in the car about how I would like to have a restaurant that did take the really, really traditional things like some kind of, you know étouffée thing, and put it in a classic form where you could—. I think probably The Bon Temps Rouler—no, Bon Ton the restaurant—you know it?

01:00:18

SR: Uh-hm, yeah.

01:00:21

KB: They do some—I had a crawfish étouffée not too long ago and it was fabulous, and they only use fresh crawfish. We can't do that because you know we—first of all we have to have it year-round because people want it and so we can't—the Louisiana crawfish doesn't freeze very well, you know, because it gets—the fat gets rancid and you have to cook it before and that's—you have to cook it. If you cook it like an étouffée and then you freeze and you thaw it out, it will be pretty—. But yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, it's okay.

01:01:02

SR: Yeah, but the Bon Ton—that is another Cajun restaurant in town I guess, or they—?

01:01:07

KB: They—you know, once again the Bon Ton never said *Cajun*. You know what I mean—.

01:01:11

SR: We were talking in the car, you were telling me that—if we could just go back there a minute, about how you think you were the first person to call your restaurant *Cajun*.

01:01:22

KB: Yeah, I am; I'm 99.9-percent sure. You know I'm positive. It was—in fact I've challenged many people to go out and find where it said *Cajun restaurant*. It never did; I promise you it never did prior to 1980, you know. But nowadays you know people will say—like I had an editor friend from the *Times of Acadiana* and he said *This guy comes to me the other day and asked me where could he get some Cajun restaurants*, and he goes *Well they're everywhere*. And I said but

yeah—*But James, until I said it nobody said it, and I challenge you to go find any reference to it anywhere and I will concede*, you know what I mean. But I can assure you I was—there was no such thing as a Cajun restaurant before I opened my restaurant in 1980, which I think is a really cool thing you know. It's like creating—it's like Mexican restaurants, Chinese restaurants, Lebanese restaurants. I was the first one; I was the first one to actually make it a category of restaurants—a Cajun restaurant, you know what I mean. That's pretty cool. Nobody really understands that. They think that I'm BSing, or that...[They say] *Well you know Don's Seafood*—. I said, *But they never said they were Cajun*. You know what I mean; that's what gives me the credentials: I said it. I put a sign up there and categorized it.

01:02:50

SR: What about—another thing we haven't talked about on the record is the really cool, unique look of the original restaurant.

01:02:57

KB: Yeah.

01:02:59

SR: Can you talk about that?

01:03:00

KB: Well you know they had—he had some little cypress, little small cypress posts in there, but I went out and I had a friend of mine go out and cut some actual trees—cypress trees—and

just left them where they were and positioned them on the dance floor. And then I put one card up on the ceiling in 1980, and now you know they're—the entire ceiling of Mulate's is filled with cards, and you know it's just—it's a wonderful thing to see you know. And you know the backdrop for the bandstand and all the art that you see there was put by me—put there by me. And it was like, to me it was like a piece of art. You know it was my [*emphasis added*] piece of art, and I gave that up in a divorce settlement to my ex-wife, and I don't feel bad about that. I mean I think I did the right thing there, but I certainly miss my piece of art you know.

01:04:02

SR: And by *cards* you mean business cards, right?

01:04:03

KB: Business cards, yeah, yeah; business cards. There are like thousands and thousands of them up there now. You know and it was just, that whole Mulate's thing in the 1980s was just phenomenal with you know all the press there, with all the movie stars, with all the rock stars. It was just—it was [*Laughs*] you know, it was just amazing. It was an amazing place. It attracted so much attention; it was just the right thing to do at the right time I guess. I mean—I was in my restaurant the night before last and it's the same thing: the music starts and people start dancing, you know, and the next thing you know there's a dad dancing with his little kid.

01:04:51

SR: Here or there?

01:04:53

KB: There—or here, here, here, here, yeah [meaning at the New Orleans restaurant].

01:04:56

SR: Because that's one thing I wanted to ask you: so is there live music every night here?

01:04:58

KB: Every night, yeah, every night yeah. and it just—it happens the same way every night and we have dancers, people that come to dance and just be a part of this and have been coming since we opened, you know. I mean there's some that, who have died who used to come every night, you know, just to be a part of it. It's a beautiful thing you know.

01:05:22

SR: And is it a challenge to get Cajun music in New Orleans every night?

01:05:28

KB: We have, let's see, I think all of the bands—no, there is one band, Lee Benoit—he comes from Lafayette. There are—we have now four bands and they're mostly all guys from Acadiana who may be living here now but are from Acadiana. It's all really—it's as authentic as we can possibly make it you know.

01:05:59

SR: So you don't say *Cajun country*, I notice. You say *Acadiana*?

01:06:05

KB: Acadiana, yeah—yeah Acadiana. It's like an Acadian—that's what we are, Acadians, you know. We think that possibly the word *Cajun* came from when the Acadians were asked what—who was their culture, who were they, and they'd say *I'm Acadian*. *I'm Acadian* [**pronounced with a French accent**]. Right, and then went to *Caj*—*Cajun* [**pronounced with a French accent**]*—to Cajun* [**pronounced with an American accent**], and it was just a corruptive thing with this *Acadian*. They were Acadians, these Acadians [**pronounced with a French accent**], but when they verbalized it, it came out sounding like *I'm a Ca-jun*, you know: *Cajun*, *Cajun*, you know. So now where were we again?

01:07:04

SR: Just the Cajun country thing.

01:07:08

KB: [**Laughs**] Yeah, I'm— and you know oddly enough, if you look at a map that the State Tourist Commission puts out, you know it's like there's a line, almost like probably a 75-mile radius of Lafayette and then it curves around and then takes in New Orleans, you know.

[**Laughs**] It takes in New Orleans and it might be just something they do but it's—it shows Cajun country and it takes in New Orleans, you know.

01:07:38

SR: And for the record, that's not really geographically correct?

01:07:42

KB: Well I mean I'm glad it is because you know I'm in New Orleans now, but—no, in New Orleans people, no, they don't think—; they don't think that they're Cajun in any way, shape, or form, you know what I mean. But there are a lot of, you know, Boudreauxs and Thibodeauxs and Fontaineauxs and all this stuff. Over here I mean there's a lot of Cajun—a lot of French names if you look in the phone book, a lot of French names you know. But they don't consider themselves Cajun.

01:08:20

SR: What was your mom's maiden name?

01:08:21

KB: Colon: C-o-l-o-n. That was, once again it was—some family tree people were telling me that it was a shortening of *Columbus* [*pronounced with a French accent*], which is *Columbus* [*pronounced with an American accent*], you know, but I don't know if that's true or not. We didn't—we have never done the family tree on that side.

01:08:40

SR: There's just a few more questions I want to ask; I hope that's all right. When you were a butcher, did you do boudin?

01:08:49

KB: You know, I did not do boudin. That's amazing; I don't know why. I never did—I mean I used to make sausage and you know like—somebody who makes smoked sausage and fresh sausage, but I never did boudin, although you know I mean I'm really—I'm still searching for the perfect boudin. I'm still searching. There are those who say that, you know, the Best Stop in Scott—you know it's right off the interstate—is the best. I've eaten it; I think it's good, but it's just not—I'm still looking for the perfect boudin.

01:09:29

SR: Did you eat boudin growing up?

01:09:31

KB: Oh my God, yes; oh yes. I mean I still eat it. I crave it today, but you can't really find it. Well you can find it in the supermarket. In fact the boudin we serve at the restaurant, I think it's as good as anything out there. It's from Richard's, and they're actually on the shelf. You can get it on the shelf; it's Richard's. They have regular boudin and smoked boudin, and we're now using the smoked boudin, which is really good. You know they just—they make it and then they put it in and they smoke it, you know, and then they package it up. And then I like all that—cracklings and stuff like that. But this Best Stop, I don't know if you've ever heard of that.

01:10:11

SR: Yes.

01:10:11

KB: This—this guy is really doing a phenomenal business, you know, and it's like an old—if the Board of Health ever came in there, you know what I mean? Because you're not supposed to lay—you know, put stuff out, like—. That's the whole thing, the ambience is like you want: you want to see sausage stacked up on there, you know what I mean? But we couldn't do that either. If the Board of Health was—you know they would shut us down in a Minnesota minute, you know what I mean.

01:10:36

SR: What about crawfish? When you were growing up, was that a big part of your eating routine—boiled crawfish—or was it just bisque and—?

01:10:46

KB: Well, you know crawfish season starts generally in late February, the real crawfish season. And I grew up before they had the ponds. But the pond crawfish come out earlier; they come out sometimes in November, like late, late November, December, January, February. But in the Atchafalaya Basin they start late February and March, April, May—those are the three big months. And so when I was growing up we went crawfishing for our crawfish; you know, we had the crawfish nets and the whole thing. We'd go catch a lot of crawfish you know because we used to go down to Henderson and it was just, you know, put some of these little nets out there with some chicken necks and catch all the crawfish you wanted, you know.

01:11:36

SR: The crawfish like chicken necks?

01:11:37

KB: Oh yeah, yeah. They like anything that—you know they like chicken necks and there's a lot of other stuff they like too, but I don't even want to discuss it. **[Laughs]** It's disgusting and you're going to eat this crawfish that just ate what you fed them? **[Laughs]**

01:11:57

SR: What about the coffee culture? What kind of—I always like asking people about this.

01:12:03

KB: Well my grandmother—oh God, I mean I really think that she was hooked; she was seriously hooked on coffee. She would drink coffee all day long, right, and she'd roast her beans in a skillet, right, and then grind them up in her grinder, her little hand grinder. You know and she barely spoke English and she liked to gamble. She liked—every time that I'd see her, I mean she wasn't a drinker or anything like that or—or—you know, but anyway my grandmother lived 'til she was 90-something and she played cards until she died. **[Laughs]** I'd go into these old bars you know and in the back there was always a card game going on and I'd get back there, and there was my grandmother **[Laughs]** playing cards. She loved it. I mean she had her Social Security, man, and that's what she loved: playing cards. Oh my God, if she had been here today with the casino—Lord have mercy, she'd either be a millionaire or she'd be like poor all the time. But she loved to gamble.

01:13:07

SR: When she made her coffee—so she made—she drank pure coffee?

01:13:12

KB: Oh yeah.

01:13:12

SR: Not chicory?

01:13:12

KB: Yeah, you know, and it was really strong and she liked the little drip pots—you know the little pots, you just add a little bit of water at a time. Oh it was a beautiful ceremonial thing, you know what I mean. And then she'd use Carnation evaporated milk. You know, I think they have that, I think they use that in Café du Monde's café au lait. I think it's one of the—I think it's part milk and part Carnation evaporated milk. Oh yeah, it's in that—that was that thing: sugar, sweet, you know a little Carnation milk but like strong coffee, you know. Oh yeah that was—and she'd drink it all day long. **[Laughs]** Just keep her buzz going I guess; I don't know. **[Laughs]**

01:14:05

SR: You have to if you get used to it.

01:14:07

KB: I guess so.

01:14:09

SR: I think—I think I'm pretty much coming down to the end of my questions. I—one thing I wanted to ask, which is maybe an unanswerable question, but if you had to define gumbo, how would you do that?

01:14:25

KB: Gumbo is a soup with combinations of seafood, sausage, chicken, duck, pheasant, rabbits, squirrels, *[Laughs]* birds, you know. It's just—it's sort of like a jambalaya and it's like, you know, just get creative you know. And—and it's so diverse; you know there's so many different ways to cook gumbo, you know with—and depending on what you put in it, and whatever seasoning you put in it, and whatever meat you put in it; you know, fowl or whatever. It's a beautiful thing and—and it's just, it's almost undefinable because there's not one particular kind of gumbo. It's just—it's anything that you can think of almost, you know what I mean? There are those—certainly like chicken and sausage gumbo which I had at least once a week when I was growing up, if not two or three times a week, which is you know—it's like a chicken and sausage you know. It's a very inexpensive thing to do and—but ultimately comes out tasting really so good, you know just a really simple—it's a very classic—chicken and sausage—a very classic back in Cajun country. But you know it's—there's so many different versions of it that you really can't put your finger on exactly what it is you know. It's just a, it's a soup with you know, all kinds of different things in it. *[Laughs]*

01:16:09

SR: Is there anything that makes you mad when you see it in gumbo, that you feel like is just breaking a rule that should not be broken?

01:16:19

KB: I—you know, well I mean I don't think you would put beef in it, you know. You know that, you don't put beef in the gumbo. So there's certain things—you don't put fish in a gumbo. Those would be totally breaking the rules there, I mean because it tastes terrible. You know it doesn't—it doesn't work. You know it doesn't work. So you know those kinds of, like certainly like fish or meat you just don't—that would be a total faux pas, you know.

01:16:52

SR: Well thank you for talking with me today.

01:16:55

KB: Did you get everything you needed?

01:16:56

SR: Yeah, unless you can think of anything that I didn't ask that you want for the record. You've given me so much time. I don't want to push it.

01:17:04

KB: No, no. When you—you know, go off the record.

01:17:09

SR: Okay, well let's—let's just say good-bye, and thank you very much.

01:17:12

KB: Well thank you so much Sara. I really enjoyed it, and I felt comfortable and I'm glad I got to tell my story to you.

01:17:20

SR: Me too.

01:17:21

[End Kerry Boutte Interview]