

Interview of: Ronni Lundy
Interviewer: April Grayson
Interview Date: October 11, 2004

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Southern Foodways Alliance Founders Oral History Project

RONNI LUNDY

Interviewer: April Grayson, Friend of the SFA

Date: October 11, 2004

Location: Oxford, MS

[Begin Ronni Lundy]

0:00:00.2

April Grayson: This is April Grayson interviewing Ronni Lundy on October 11, 2004 in Oxford, Mississippi, just following the Southern Foodways Symposium. Thank you. I was wondering if you could tell me how you became involved with SFA [Southern Foodways Alliance].

0:00:27.9

Ronni Lundy: I'm sure John Egerton roped me into it, and I'm sure that--that 90-percent of your interviews begin that way you know. **[Laughs]** I--there have been a couple of attempts to form an organization around the concept of Southern food. Two that I was aware of that--that had been I think maybe perhaps a little more limited in their scope than SFA, actually is and John Egerton saw an opportunity when the Center for--is it the Center for--?

0:01:06.1

AG: It's the Study of--.

0:01:05.8

RL: It's the Study of Southern Culture--thank you; I--I always just call it *The Center* you know; so **[Laughs]**. So right when the Center--when the Center expressed a willingness to house us and to help us with a Director, John Egerton saw this great opportunity. And the wonderful thing that he did was instead of going to one or two people that he was close to, he went to I think there are 50 of us, and said *would you be willing to come in on the ground floor and be involved with this, you know; contribute ideas;* and he--I--to me it's the key to this organization that from the very outset there was a choice made to make it inclusive--not an exclusive organization. You know, there are other food organizations that you have to be invited to join; there are other food organizations that you actually have to meet a professional criteria--some even a test in order to be a part of; more common is that there are other organizations that just tend to gravitate around a core kind of clique group of people who want to hold onto their turf and territory. And you know, John is the person who--who said years ago that the difference--that the defining thing about Southern food and--and most folkway foods is that--as opposed to formal food instruction--is that it doesn't say you must learn to do this and you may never do it as well as I do. It says everyone is welcome at the table.

So--so I was one of the people welcomed to the table, and I was very pleased to be included. I was unable to attend the first conference, but we have forgiven him at last. We're in the seventh year now but in that first year, John T. Edge, who is usually much smarter than this scheduled the conference on Kentucky Derby weekend. We do not know what he was thinking. **[Laughs]** It would be somewhat like having a Jewish Food Conference scheduled during Yom Kippur and **[Laughs]** I was like--it was just not a good idea. So you know but--but he has since seen the error of his ways, and we now hold it in the fall, and we wisely jump it around to accommodate the University of Mississippi football weekends. We--we all understand now that

there are certain things that are very important. And--and I've been coming since the second--the second conference; I've attended all conferences except one and have been a member of the Board and got--and--and--and freely--freely offer my opinion whether it's requested or not.

[Laughs]

0:04:11.4

AG: That's great; the two organizations that you mentioned early on--was that the ASFI, the American Southern Food Institute and Society for Preservation and Revitalization of Southern Foods?

0:04:25.5

RL: Yes; I think so. I'm--I'm 90 percent sure that that's so. If--if--if the John(s) say that's what we're referring to, that is what we're referring to. Interestingly enough, I had read about both of those organizations but had never been involved with them and--and they seem to be I think by virtue of the--the sheer mechanics of it they seem to be much more regionally focused--that--that they dealt with the people that were immediately in their regions. And--and Southern Foodways again reached out to every area that can be defined as Southern and also consciously included people who were not working in the South but working in a Southern food vernacular.

0:05:19.3

AG: So do you think that inclusiveness is what has helped SFA survive as opposed to the other earlier--?

0:05:26.5

RL: Oh, I think it's what defines us; I think it is our greatest glory. I think it is the really--the core reason for this organization and it--and it comes through on so many levels--not just this geographic inclusiveness but there has been consciously from the outset we have verbalized that this is also an organization that includes all races and ethnicities and all classes of people from the South and--and--and that is very, very important to the survival of this organization. I don't think that those organizations--I don't know enough about those organizations to say this fully but I have no sense that they were attempting to be exclusive, but I think that they were limited by the--the support that they had. But the--you know it--it's such a boon to us just to have the sheer physical support of the University of Mississippi--Mississippi, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and--and to have someone like John T. Edge, who has been our Director from the get-go, who is just a Jack Russell Terrier of a director. **[Laughs]**

0:06:46.8

AG: **[Laughs]** Good word.

0:06:47.5

RL: Yeah, he'll bite my ankle for that. *[Laughs]*

0:06:52.1

AG: So you mentioned the meeting, the--the first meeting that was scheduled on Derby--on Derby weekend.

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RL: Right.

0:06:59.8

AG: Was that the organization meeting in Birmingham?

0:07:02.2

RL: No; I was not at the organizational meeting in Birmingham either and I can't--I--I--there are several things that--that were happening all at the same time at that time, including a family illness of my mother, which I was the primary person dealing with. So I was not able to go to Birmingham, which truly broke my heart. I was a little indignant over the Derby fiasco *[Laughs]*, you know, and I--have we mentioned that I'm a Kentuckian? And I'm sure that *[Laughs]*--I'm sure that that's evident by this point.

But I could not wait to get here for the second conference which is--is the first one that I attended and forever remains an--an extraordinary event to me for--for many reasons.

0:07:50.4

AG: Could you share some of those reasons?

0:07:51.7

RL: Well first of all there is--there's the nature of this--of this group that when they assemble [*Dog Barking*] it is--dogs--you do not need to be on here. Okay; well we'll pause here. The--the nature of the--of the group when we meet is--first of all these are such incredibly bright people that there is all of this stimulating, intellectual conversation but they are so warm also that it is very much--I have missed my family reunions. We used to have two a year when I was a child and they stopped probably when I was in my teens. We started, you know the families moving away, we're losing the fabric of--of cousins; I'm--I'm still of that generation where I grew up running with all my cousins and spending time with them. My daughter has very little awareness of that. She has--she does have relationships with some cousins but they have--not--not anything like--like mine was. And--and so we stopped having family reunions on a regular basis when I was in my teens and only occasionally get together. This is like a family reunion for me, so that--so there's an emotional level where that's true and where this organization has in fact responded on a very personal level to be a support system. Okay; we'll stop again because--. [*Dog Barking*]

It was--it was an extraordinary experience for me to be on the campus of the University of Mississippi--meeting on the campus of the University of Mississippi. I am 55 years old; so I grew up during the Civil Rights Movement and it was the defining experience of my life, the defining experience of my political consciousness. My parents were very liberal and very conscious of what was going on. We discussed the Civil Rights Movement. We read everything we could get our hands on, saw it on television and experienced it, and the University of Mississippi had meant one thing to me and--and that was it was an--an icon of prejudice and segregation, fear, you know. I drove through Philadelphia or past the turnoffs for Philadelphia and Mississippi; it's very, very iconic in--in an incredibly powerful way and there was a time in my life when I actually said I would never set foot in the state of Mississippi. And I had since discovered I've been coming through and stopping and had discovered things were changing here, but I--I went over to Bernard Observatory, and I spoke at the end of that [Foodways] conference. I was the last speaker. And the first night that I was here, I was driving through the back woods on the way to Taylor Grocery with Vertamae Grosvenor in the car and we were hysterical. We were--we were giggling and going *can you believe; here we are a white girl and a black girl driving down the back roads of Mississippi and we're not running from anybody. We're running to a group of people that welcome us and--and are glad to see us?* And then I stood up in front of that group and saw black and white faces together in--in a genuine communion, you know. There is no other way to describe this organization besides just one great big communion for a whole weekend in this place. And I thought you know we moved glacially and yet sometimes you get to stand back and see where the--the glacier was and where it has come to and how it has diminished in size. It's still enormous but it has diminished so incredibly in size, and--and it was an extraordinary--extraordinary experience, you know. And the fact that

we have been breaking bread, particularly cornbread with no sugar in it, all through that weekend together was--was really incredible--really incredible.

It's--it--nothing else that would have made me devoted to this organization and to its cause. And--and this weekend as you know seven--the seventh meeting, we met to discuss directly race and food and we're in a larger space now. We're not back in Bernard Observatory. But we discussed with such honesty and fierceness; we said the kinds of things to each other that families say to each other. There were bruised feelings, there were wounds opened and there was balm applied and wounds--wounds healed and nourishment given and we continued to be true to that initial vision that through food we not only are going to explore the past of the South, but we're going to shape the future of the South in a way that is going to be rich and inclusive and--and full of respect and love for one another. And I do--it gives me great joy to be involved in an organization like that.

0:13:47.7

AG: Do you think it's fair to say that--that kind of conciliation and inquisitives was part of your original vision for the organization, or--or what was your vision at the onset and how has it changed?

0:14:01.6

RL: It certainly--it certainly is--is what John Egerton presented to me as the possibility for this organization. He is--he is a unique person and of course we say his name a lot and you know we

have a joke that we were all going to get bumper stickers that said WWJED [What Would John Egerton Do?] [*Laughs*] But John is an extraordinary person because he comes into this organization as the definitive Southern foods scholar. You know there are many of us--well I won't even include myself as a scholar, but there are many in this organization who have made the scholarship of Southern food their life's work and have contributed enormously. John is the synthesizer of all that; he's the person who can take the obscure and the arcane and the abstract and the particular and shape it together into a vision that he can then present in very clear language to a much larger audience, and that's what his book *Southern Food* has done. And it--it is a defining book for all of us who work in this realm.

But John also comes from a background of political work--political writing and reporting--reporting on education reform and reporting on the Civil Rights Movement, and I'm sure as you know that his book *Speak Now Against the Day* has won the Kennedy Prize and is considered also one of the classic defining books of the Southern civil rights experience. So in anything that John does there is always this greater movement to--to helping us understand who we were fully--not--not just to accept the romantic images, not to just accept the demonized images but to keep peeling away layers to get to the root of--of who we were and why we were and who we can be, and yeah, I understood that from the beginning and that's why I wanted to be in the organization, yeah.

0:16:12.2

AG: Do you think that's changed any over the years or--?

0:16:16.0

RL: Well we have a real good time in this group and we eat great and we are very funny and we are--we're just a great place to hang out, and I think that a lot of people who come to the group the first time come into it for those reasons, you know. A lot of people come to our meetings to find out a specific piece of information, something that's piqued their curiosity. A lot of people from out of the South are coming down to eat Southern food but think they know what Southern culture is about and are not really coming here to delve deeper.

What amazes me is our conversion rate [*Laughs*], which is pretty extraordinary. You know we have people who walk in here who are just here for the ribs and end up staying for the religion and that's pretty--pretty impressive, you know--come back year after year; say that they had no idea that--that we were going to stand up and argue with each other about--about who gets the right to claim fried chicken and why that matters, you know. So I think that we have--we have grown; we have broadened what we do, but no, I don't think that we have lost the core focus and you know that's illustrated in the fact that--that we are in a time in this country when we have all but stopped the dialogue on race in--in any sort of political or public forum. We use catch-phrases; we--we do double-speak; we pretend that appointing a black man as the Secretary of Defense and as a Supreme Court Justice has resolved issues for everyone; we create a demonized class of poor white people that both liberals and conservatives attribute with all the horrible characteristics that, in fact, they are guilty of and--and that demonized class always--always speaks with a Southern drawl. We--we continue over the table and using food as the rubric--we continue to talk about this in frank and sometimes painful terms in the hopes that we can move on--keep moving on and keep reaching some level of--of truth about it, you know.

0:19:03.7

AG: Uh-hmm. Are there specific topics or projects that you would like to see as something to take on in the future?

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RL: Yeah, there are certain things that are very important to me and--and I looked around this year and [*Laughs*] I can see that we're actually doing some of them instead of paying lip service. One of them--one thing that's been incredibly important to me is that we needed a younger membership. We need--we need--I see myself as part of the geezer generation; I'm 55. From the outset it has thrilled me to see younger and younger people joining the organization actively--not just--not just coming to the party but--but becoming Board Members and being on committees and you know doing work like the oral history work and this--it's essential for this to be what we intend it to be which is an organization for the future as well as the past. And I think that we can do even more outreach. Right now we have this wonderful Glory Foods Scholarship that assures that we are bringing more young African Americans into the professional realm of making food, writing about food, food scholarship, in--in all aspects. I think we had a young woman who works in farming and production this year who is one of the recipients as well as a scholar, and we've had young budding chefs, etcetera. The--the purpose is two-fold; it's to bring them into this world and to also give them a good grounding in what their roots are.

I would love to see us create some sort of scholarship program that also invites in poor white students as well and affords them some level of dignity. It's--it--poor white Southerners right now--particularly young poor white Southerners are facing a--a cultural discrimination that the generation of young black Southerners--my generation of young black Southerners faced, which is that there are tremendous assumptions about who they are. There's a stereotypical presence that is overwhelming and I can see that being a part of our organization and working in Foodways and understanding your culture and understanding the hard work and the intelligence, the ingenuity, the creativity, the people who prepared food for the last centuries, gives you a grounding and understanding and being proud of who you are, and I'd love to see us be able to do that--to reach out across a class divide as well as a color divide.

I want--I want to see us explore class issues more specifically. I'd like to see us take on gender issues. It's--it's very interesting; at some point we are going to have to have a conference talking about the white woman in the kitchen of the South because in--in our determination to restore the--the rightful place of black cooks and farmers and--and nurturers, we have to some extent demonized white women from--from past centuries up to--up through the 20th Century and we are going to have to do some--some hard work and speak some difficult truths to say it was not all the way that--that it is now being presented. It certainly wasn't romantic the way it was presented years ago, but it is not the way it's being presented now. So I hope that we're going to talk about that.

I would like very much for this organization to be--to take as one of its causes--to take up as one of its causes the small farmer in the South and finding--helping to nurture and encourage the--the continuance of small farmers. Right now we are--we are rediscovering the richness of the Southern garden, which is the garden of America, you know. Don't talk to me about

California [*Pshhh*]*--*those people have no idea what food is, you know. They*--*I mean they've*--* they've done a good job of you know creating things but*--*but the South is where we grow the most extraordinarily flavored fruits and vegetables, where we raise*--*where we know how to raise meat in a way that not only assures its quality and its purity but also its flavor. I mean and*--*and we are able to tap into that because there are small farmers who are making a change from a tobacco base or cotton base into a traditional food base and*--*and they're providing this to restaurants and they are providing it to smart consumers and they're providing it to farm markets, but it's a tenuous connection right now. These people are*--*these people are riding on a wave of*--* of style and*--*and trend because Southern food is trendy, and we should be working as hard as we can to create markets and to create awareness and to create a support system that will allow these small farms to continue when that trend backs off, and to educate the consumer and the person who is eating to the value of paying more money for something that's grown by somebody down the street and tastes incredible than to pay less money for something that was grown in Peru or Chile and shipped here. And we need to be raising consciousness about the*--*the economics of food.

The economics of food is*--*is a story of the economics of the South. It*--*it is also a story of global economics right now and we need to be talking about that a lot and studying that a lot. So those are all directions I'd like to see this organization go.

0:25:45.6

AG: So tell me about your involvement specifically with past symposia; I know last year you played a key role in that. Is that*--*?

0:25:58.1

RL: Yeah. Well yeah, I guess. *[Laughs]* I was--I was the house hillbilly. *[Laughs]* I guess--the first year that I came here which was the second year we had a--how shall I say--a spirited discussion broke open about the role of black and white creators in--in the past. And there is--there is a prevalent myth that--that always surfaces at these meetings that--that is--that is a correction of a past egregious error and that--the past error is to attribute all Southern home culinary ability to white women and the correction that we're making, the extreme correction that we're making is to fall into saying that all cooking in the South was done by black women in both black and white kitchens--all home cooking. And that simply is not--not true and although it's--it was very common and it needs to be recognized, the--it--that contribution of black cooks must be recognized but we also have to understand the contribution of white cooks and white growers and white farmers and--and--and having been raised in the mountain South which is very different than the deep South or other parts of the South, I come from an unusual background that has made me fairly conscious of--of the fact that all white Southerners are not the same. So I was the person who stood up--I'm often the person who stands up and says *hey wait a minute; you know this is not always the case*. And--and so I spoke to that at the end of the conference in--in a--in a--in a brief talk that was meant to be the benediction and bring us all back to the table together as a group to--to you know--well that sure made that sound pretentious didn't it?

Anyway I spoke to the fact that--that we have to acknowledge everyone's experience and--and that my experience for instance as a mountain Southerner was not that that was being

portrayed of white Southerners and--and so I think from that it became important to everyone to--to explore the culture in the mountain South in a very real term. You know there are so many stereotypes from *Beverly Hillbillies* and *Deliverance* and--and *Aunt Bee*--well actually, now I like *Aunt Bee*. I shouldn't--shouldn't rag on her. But--but there's so many stereotypes, so last year in the sixth conference we looked at the food-ways of the--of the Appalachian culture and as always the prism--it's a prism that opens up other colors and--and--and spectrum, another spectrum. We also looked at issues of class--what it means--what it meant to be poor and white and--and from the South while what it means to--the most important issue to me is what it does to human beings to have your history, your culture, and your definition of who you are taken over by someone who is not from your region and presented and defined for you in such an overwhelming that--that you lose track of--of who you are. And that's what we discussed and we looked at it through the lens of--of food-ways, which interestingly enough, when Jessica Harris and I first met many years ago, long before Southern Foodways and we hung out together for several days, we discovered--something we both had--had pretty much understood which is that we use the history of food to refute the stereotypical images of our people, you know. Most specifically that our people are lazy and they're stupid and they're--will do anything to shirk work, that--that we are--mountain culture oddly enough gets defined as un-generous, that people are clannish, and I often say *yes, yes* that there are feuds sometimes in the mountains and in those cases if you've crossed someone they might kill you but they will feed you first. You're not going--you aren't--they are not dispatching you to that other world on an empty stomach, you know. **[Laughs]**

So--so anyway; so--so--so we did that last year and it was a wonderful and extraordinary experience. It was a great joy to me to--to participate in that and to see so many other people

participate. I was--I don't really think that I was so much a key person as--as--there was also-- because I had been ill a few years before I think there was--it was sort of done as a gift to me which was a really beautiful thing that we looked at this, but there were so many people here speaking and addressing this--an extraordinary piece, and please forgive me for not remembering her name, but an extraordinary piece of scholarship from a young woman who examined the politics of biscuits, cornbread and white bread in the mountain South, the impact of the--of the school movement at the turn of the century that was seen as a very positive thing on--on the mountain South, but in fact was--was also an erosion of the culture.

Bill Best was here and Bill is--we honored him for his work as a farmer and keeping heirloom seeds, but Bill is also a scholar at Appalachian culture and many of his words and thoughts informed us. The most important one from last year was his observation that when the larger American culture--the larger culture--popular culture began to move into the mountain South what it offered was a culture of things, of--of adding things to your life, buying things, having houses, having cars, having--having disposable commodities which is what popular American culture is about. But what it was replacing was a culture of connection that--that what defined the Appalachian South and is one of the reasons that people look at the Appalachian South and think that people are poorer than they are is that--that what matters to them is their connection to one another--not what they have but what they are and how they reach out to each other--really beautiful, beautiful concept, something that as very important from last year.

0:33:23.9

AG: I was wondering if I could shift a little bit to the personal, and if you could start by telling me your date and place of birth.

0:33:32.5

RL: Uh-hmm, I think I can remember that. **[Laughs]** I was born on August 1st in--in 1949 in Corbin, Kentucky, which is in the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains and my family--my parents were both from Corbin and all of my--not all of my but many of my kinfolks were from there. When I was a year old we moved to Louisville, Kentucky and I was raised in the city; so I was part of the hillbilly Diaspora. But we went home every summer and I spent--even when I was a little child, when I was about three or four years old, my great-aunts and uncles would come up on the L&N train from Corbin and they would get me and take me back down to Corbin for a couple days. So I grew up in two places as a child, and--and then as I grew older I became more of a--a city girl and more involved in--you know I'm a baby-boomer and I'm more involved in the world of the 1960s but I have since discovered that--that a lot--that most of my life, my--as I came of age has been a process of trying to bring together these--these two worlds that I had one foot in, traditional Appalachian culture, and one foot in the 1960s and 1970s America sort of breaking open like this over-ripe fruit, you know and that incredible culture; and so most of my life and certainly most of my work has been a process of trying to bring those two things together. I think you just wanted the date and place of my birth right? **[Laughs]**

0:35:23.9

AG: No, no, you're answering other questions that I don't even need to ask anymore. I was wondering if you could talk about the meals of your childhood. Who were the preparers in your home and what were the meals like and was there a ceremony around that?

0:35:40.1

RL: Oh, yeah. [*Laughs*] My mother prepared all the meals in my home. Now in--in my house in Louisville; when we went to Corbin aunts and cousins whose houses we stayed at would prepare meals and it surprised me--something I thought of when I was older is that my mother in most cases deferred to whoever's house we were at. She did not become involved in preparing the food. There were a couple of exceptions--when we stayed with her brother and my aunt--both she and my aunt cooked together and there was a very--I was conscious--I--I--one of my first consciousnesses was what we ate--what you ate a lot of at certain people's houses because they were known for making that and what you didn't eat at their houses and--and there was a pecking order.

My mother's family--both my mother's and father's families had extraordinary cooks. My mother's family--my father's sisters--one of my father's sisters was a good cook and the other--one of them didn't cook and the other one didn't care about the cooking, and so being invited to her house for dinner was always a bit of a trial for my mom and for me, you know. But--but at the family reunions I could--I could recognize by the age I think of seven--I could recognize my Aunt Ariel's jam cake from all the other jam cakes and that's the first jam cake that you went to. I could recognize my mother's cousin, Jessie's, green beans from all the other green beans and

those are the green beans you went to first. It didn't mean you didn't eat the other ones; you just ate those until they were gone and then you went onto the other ones. And--and I knew Ethel's chicken and I--you know really--really and interesting thing that I--I had those down already and we understood and knew this.

So--but--but in my home my mother cooked. My mother cooked three meals a day. There was not a formal eating time. My father was a factory worker and he worked swing shift which means that two days of the week he worked from seven until three and two days of the week he worked from three until eleven and two nights of the week he worked from eleven at night until seven in the morning and one day he was off unless he was working overtime which he often did because we were very poor and--and needed the money. So--so sometimes the family meal was in the afternoon and sometimes the family meal was of an evening and sometimes the family meal was a Midnight breakfast. I--I got to stay up until like ten o'clock at night when I was a child so that daddy and I could have breakfast together before he went off to work. And my mom--she often didn't eat at that time but she cooked and we stayed in the--in the kitchen together.

I had one sister who was 12 years older than I was and--so she had married and moved by the time that I was seven but--but before that time we had meals together. We always seemed--there's a thing that I say; my mother has always--my mother died a few years ago, but in her lifetime there was always at least one more bed in our house than there were people living there to sleep in it and that was because we always had someone staying with us. We often had an aunt who was widowed or--and--or a cousin who was widowed or divorced or in hard times and their child and then for holidays--for many years we went to Corbin for Christmas and then when my dad's work schedule got to be more complicated and he couldn't leave for those times my

cousins came up and my aunts and uncles would come up to Louisville and they would stay with us and--and we'd sometimes have 10 or 12 people staying in our five-room house, and my mother would prepare these incredible feasts and you know they would bring food. They would bring canned food or in the summer they would bring garden food and she would cook from that.

You asked if there was a--a ceremony or ritual and--and we said grace. We were not--we--we were--I was raised in a spiritual household but I was not raised in a religious household. We weren't church-goers. In fact we were church leavers; my--my mother and sister left the church in Louisville because they were having a revival and they were passing out flyers and they told the--the people in the church that they gave the flyers to--to be sure and not put them on the wrong people's houses--the dark people's houses because we didn't want them coming. And we left that church.

We left a church when I was a child because the minister told us not to vote for John Kennedy because he was a papist. We never went back there; so we weren't--weren't big church people but we were very religious--I mean we were very spiritual and--and what I have since grown up to say is that I was raised by loaves and fishes Christians because the--the basic spiritual tenet of the--my family is that there's always enough food. And I have a strong vision repeatedly of seeing my mother coming to the table with a platter that had enough pork chops for however many of us were there plus an extra or two. And the doorbell ringing at dinner time and her turning as my father went to the door saying *well I'll be; look who it is. Come on in; have dinner with us*; my mother turning to the kitchen and when she returned it was with a plate that had pork and potatoes--chopped up pork and potatoes so there would be enough to go around and no one need feel like they were depriving us of any food etcetera.

So we would say grace at the table but what I realized later is that my mother had this wonderful spiritual litany that she would say over meals that were particularly good and--and it was hard to please her. She was always critiquing her own cooking, but sometimes she hit it and she liked me believed that if--if something ended up great, it wasn't your fault; it was God's fault and--and so you were able to go *oh my God this tastes so good; I can't believe how good this is--like give me more of that*. And then she would begin this litany of people alive and dead that she wished were at the table because this was their food. She would say *oh, oh, oh, I wish your Uncle Jack was here to have this; he just loves you know fresh corn on the cob. When he was little he would eat it and oh, I--*and it went on to include you know as we added people. My niece, Abbey, always got invoked when we had beef and noodles that my mother made because that was her favorite thing, and--and then there were dead people that I had never even met that you know--*oh, oh your Aunt Rox, your Great-Aunt Rox; she would have loved this, or, oh my momma mad this*. And so when I began to write about the Passover Seder, my second book was about holidays and how we celebrated and--and I began to understand this ritual of the Passover Seder of invoking ancestors and spirits and--and bringing everyone to the table. It was like *ah, we did that; that's exactly what we did and we did it in the same spirit I think*. This was my mother longing for the homeland, longing to be taken back to the mountains and the culture--that culture of connection that--that Bill Best was talking about and these people and surrounded by these people. And so I grew up surrounded by people who weren't there; you know I had--I had a relationship with all of my grandparents all of whom had been dead long before I was born, but they were very real to me in the context of this table.

And--and one other thing of the table and then I'll--then I'll quit. That was the beginning of the meal. As the meal progressed my father took over the ritual and my father was this

extraordinary remember(er) and story-teller. You know he didn't--he didn't--oh he could tell jokes. He was--he was actually a great joke teller which I didn't know because--until I was much older because apparently many of his jokes were risqué and he wouldn't tell them in front of my sister and me. But--but he remembered--he was--he remembered the fabric of life and he could come home from work where another person would have ridden on the bus and my mom could do this, too, but my dad was incredible about it, and not seen anything and come home and tell us all these stories that had unfolded in front of him and who the people had been and--and what had happened. And anyway he--he had been quite--quite a character as a young man and he was much beloved and he had many friends.

And--so as dinner unfolded these stories would start to come out and when we had company there, these cousins and aunts and relatives, they'd have stories also and we would sit--there have been times that we have been at the table say for a Noon meal, maybe for Christmas or--or our relatives are visiting for the summer and we're having that Noon meal of all those vegetables and we sit at the table and the stories start and the food gets--while the stories are going the food gets covered up and put away and put in the refrigerator and we--and there's coffee and there's Coca Colas and iced tea and--and the stories continue and nobody moves from that place. And it's--the evening comes and the food gets unwrapped and put back on the table and we're all eating again without ever having left. And--and--and just this richness of stories has--has come through the whole thing.

So that--that was how I grew up and it--and it was also in many ways we managed to--to recapture some of that for my daughter even though the family was gone and my father had--had died. My daughter who is 25 grew up in a house where we always had at least one meal a day together and also where we had friends or--and I--I eventually took over the family celebrations

and the cousins came to our house, but in--in lieu of cousins who were scattered to the wind, we now had friends who sat at our table and told these stories and carried on and had these kinds of--of feasts also. And by golly she's doing it herself. She--she now creates these meals and has her friends over and everyone tells stories and--and she serves the foods that my mother served also. It's really exciting; really a beautiful thing. Okay--[Laughs]

0:47:04.6

AG: No; that's wonderful--wonderful. So how did you transition into food professionally and--?

0:47:15.6

RL: [Laughs] By default.

0:47:15.4

AG: Just back then--?

0:47:17.7

RL: Well this may--will come as no surprise probably to anyone who has ever heard me speak [Audio Pause]--Southern Foodways but I think I had written a couple--I wrote a couple of food pieces for the *Courier Journal*. I--I wrote for them as a feature--features writer from the early

1980s until the mid-1990s. I was variously a frequent contributor, and then I was a staff writer, and I was the pop music critic, and I wrote primarily about music--popular music, a--a great deal about--I was really lucky, I came in just as bluegrass music started to infiltrate country and people liked Dwight Yoakam and Lyle Lovett came along and K.D. Lang, and I was able to talk and write about these people.

But occasionally I would write something about food because I was interested in food. I had been--before I started writing at the age of 30 professionally, I had made money by working in restaurants. I was a waitress and a cook and a manager of restaurants through my 20s. So I had a little bit of an insider's knowledge. *Esquire Magazine* through--through a series of circumstances and the grace of Roy Blunt, Jr. had invited me to do a piece about Sam Bush, a bluegrass musician, and when I did, the person who did their--their front section called *Man at His Best*, Anita LeClerc the editor there, contacted me and said *we'd love to have you write pieces for us about Southern culture. Is there anything that you really would like to write about?* And I said *Yes, ma'am; I want to write about how you really make cornbread because a lot of people are getting this wrong.* And--and so they let me write this piece about cornbread that begins, *If God had meant for cornbread to be--to have sugar in it he'd have called it cake*, you know which has--which has become--which apparently is going to be on my tombstone when I die. **[Laughs]** I hope, you know.

So--so from that they actually had me write more pieces about food, and I started to sort of establish this reputation as somebody who knew something about food. I went down to Louisiana and made boudin with Ronnie Comeaux in Lafayette, Louisiana, and I wrote about that and--and meanwhile I'm still writing about music. And one day an agent from New York called up my friend Vince Staten who is one of the Co-Authors of *Real Barbecue* and asked

Vince if he would be interested in writing a cookbook that talked about Southern country cooking and also about country music in that context and Vince said *no, I'm--I'm writing another book but I know exactly the person you should talk to*. And they put the agent in touch with me and it was just--it was an incredible blessing. I--I did this book for Atlantic Monthly Press for an Editor, John Barstow, my Connecticut Yankee Editor. John Barstow who understood from the get-go that I didn't want to write a celebrity cookbook and I didn't want it to be schlock and he opened the door for me to write a book about--to write a book that's actually a recreation of what I just told you about that table of people sitting around and telling their stories around the table.

So I went and got to go out and talk to Dwight Yoakam and Emmy Lou Harris and John Prine and Chet Atkins and Bill Monroe and all these people and say *what did you eat and what--what part did food play in the culture that you grew up in and how does it relate to your music*, and--and one of the questions that I had on my list to ask them is *where do--where do you like to find country food now* with the intent of finding restaurants out there. And inevitably what they said was *my mother's table, my grandmother's--or my grandmother's table*. And--and then they said *do you want to meet my mother or would you like to talk to my grandmother* and so there--from that I'm on the phone with Brenda Lee's mother discussing how you make this incredible fried chicken with no skin which is almost a sin in the South but you--but you soak it in buttermilk and then you coat it and it makes its own skin. And John Prine's mother and I are having this discussion about *now when you say you put a cup in is that a teacup like an English teacup or is that a diner coffee cup?* And she's saying *wait a minute; let me go look and see*. *Yeah; it's a diner coffee cup. It's got the handle broken off of it, blah-blah-blah*; so that was how I got--got to do this.

And--and I brought--I of course brought my own stories and my own background to the table and I discovered that I knew a lot more than I thought I knew particularly about Appalachian and--and Southern food but mostly what I trade on is what I've always traded on which is asking people who do know what their experience is and what their understanding is and then learning from that and reporting that back. And so from that I started to get this reputation as somebody who knew about food.

In fact, what--what I know is what I--I have learned by my own experience, which I think is an important thing to understand. There's a real value to the kind of scholarship that is being done by many of my peers who spend a great deal of time in--in libraries and sorting through past information and past references. But--but the other thing that I love about Southern Foodways is that we equally value--what we're doing right now, the oral experience and I--and I value that because it allows people at the table that have otherwise been shut out--you know part of the reason we don't have an understanding of the black contribution to Southern food is that it was not written down, you know. The people who wrote down things were--were exclusively white and the same thing is true of Appalachian--certainly of rural Appalachian cooking and rural white cooking. So--so that allows us to the table, you know; and--and I love--you know I love my work. My work all through my life has been to--to listen to good music and dance, to eat good food, and to ask people questions that you otherwise wouldn't be able to ask them in polite society. *Why do you do that?* **[Laughs]** So it's--it's really great; so that--that was how I started doing that and from that I did other cookbooks. I have retired from recipe writing. There is so many people. I'm--writing recipes is like writing in a second language for me because I was--is it Kathy Starr who calls it a Dump Cook? I'm trying to remember, but you know I was basically one of those people who stand in--and I call it a refrigerator cook that I stand there and look at

the refrigerator and go *oh we'll put that together*; you know. So I now often write text for books that have other people's recipes--people who I admire like John Stehling of--of the *Early Girl Eatery* in Asheville, North Carolina, and mostly they just let me sit around and pronounce things and that's really fun--make pronouncements. **[Laughs]**

0:54:55.1

AG: That's great; that sounds very fun. I was wondering--do you mind talking about your illness and how--?

0:55:03.1

RL: No, not at all.

0:55:03.9

AG: John T. had mentioned that there was a fund-raiser for the SFA and--.

0:55:07.8

RL: Oh, can I talk about this because this is an extraordinary thing. It's an extraordinary thing. I--I went through several transitions in my life at--at the Millennium. My husband of 25 years who remains my very dear wonderful friend but we decided to separate and pursue different lives.

And as a part of that in the summer of 2001 I moved to Asheville, North Carolina [***Dog Barking***] because--this should come as no surprise to anybody who's a mountain person, I had been dying to get back to the eastern mountains, the Blue Ridge particularly. My daughter was in school at Warren Wilson outside of Asheville. I found a house where she and a couple of her friends could live there for a while and help me work on the house and everything just seemed to be very peachy. This was in August of 2001, which of course as everyone knows was a traumatic time for all of us. Then we go through September 11th which was horrifying enough in itself, but by October of that year I just had been diagnosed with fourth-stage ovarian cancer and fourth-stage is terrible. It--it's not a very hopeful diagnosis and my cancer had--had been all through my abdomen. I had major surgery to remove everything. It was up in my diaphragm as well. It blessedly was not in my lymph nodes but it had metastasized in my liver. And I had a tumor--I had a couple tumors that they couldn't get through surgery and they could not operate on the tumors in my liver because of the--there were two tumors there--because of the location; and so essentially I began a treatment of chemotherapy to improve the--to reduce the size of those tumors, to improve the quality of my life and to perhaps give me an extension. And it--it is dangerous; I tread on this lightly because it's--it--it is dangerous to look at the statistics for cancer and believe that--that is your determined fate, and I'm a proof of that. But in looking at the statistics for this cancer, the possibility of surviving as much as a year is--is very, very, very small.

So there I was you know in this--in this new town; I'm so grateful. My daughter was able to be with me without leaving school. I--you know what an incredible thing. People from Asheville, I had taken a job at Lark Books, this publishing company and had left--I hadn't even met all the people there and they called up--called my daughter up and said for the next month

we're going to prepare dinner for you all on every week night. And they delivered--they had a meal that we picked up at Lark Books every weekday that--it was incredible for everyone in our house. There were five people living in the house. My--he was still my husband then; he was living in Alaska and had to keep living there, had to keep working there, because that was my health insurance, so he's flying back. And my nephew gave him frequent flyer miles. Jessica Harris who is a founding member of the SFA called me up and--and gave me frequently flyer miles for him--offered her frequent flyer miles for him.

In the course of this, Sarah Fritschner, who is a member of the SFA and is a long-time friend of mine and the Food Editor of the *Courier Journal* in Louisville and attended the symposium that year. Sarah attended the symposium that year, went home to Louisville, brushed her teeth, took a shower and drove down to Asheville to--to be with me at--in the hospital when I had my catheter implanted and to tell me all the stories [*Laughs*] from--from the SFA which was really good. I think that's the year that we got a couple people arrested [*Laughs*], and you know there were many tales. She was great, and of course everyone there--John T. announced what was going on. They took up a collection. People sent me money; people started writing me--sending me love and all this energy. And Sarah said *you know I know you're going to be strapped for money*, and I was. I mean I had not counted on this. I had a little bit of savings but I suddenly could not work. Ken's job that he had taken in Alaska paid less than his previous job. We had a child in school that we were paying for school and--and even with good insurance which I had, you have medical bills that--that are scary. And so Sarah said *you know you're going to be strapped for money. Would you mind if I asked Joe Castro and Kathy Cary, two chefs in Louisville--Joe is at the English Grille; Kathy is at Lilly's, who are--are friends of mine--friends of mine as well as friends of Sarah's--they want to know what they can do; how about if*

we have a dinner in December that they cook at and they make recipes from your cookbook and we'll sell your cookbook and we'll give all the money to you? And I went oh that would be great you know. I had some hardback copies of the book, and I gave them to Sarah.

And Sarah went home and a couple days later--or about two weeks later she called me and she said *Jamie Estes*, who is a member of Southern Foodways now and is in fact doing our fund-raising and she's the PR person. She was then at Food Service Associates, and Jamie and I are long friends and we had worked together--and she said *Jamie Estes is getting involved in this and she's--she's talking to a couple of other people; Dean--Dean Corbett from Equus [restaurant] in Louisville wants to be involved and Susan Seiller wants to be involved from Jack Fry's [restaurant] and Lynn Winter wants to be involved from Lynn's Paradise Cafe. So you know it might be a little bit bigger. And I'm going, God that's great; that's wonderful.*

And then--and then we go through Christmas and sometime in January John T. calls me up and we're talking about something and my chemo was going very well. It was very exciting, you know. I was having a positive response to the chemo. My--you do a blood test that you get these numbers called CA-125 numbers and my CA-125 numbers were unbelievably fabulous but I still had a tumor on my liver and it--it had shrunk but it was no shrinking anymore. But it was in control and I'm going *wow; maybe I get to stick around for another year or two, you know.* And I'm going *John T I'm--I'm coming to the next conference. I'm going to be there.* And--and anyway it's all very exciting and we're discussing something; and then at the end of it John T. says *listen, Jamie Estes asked me to ask you what we should call this benefit.* And I said *what benefit?* And he said *you know the benefit for you.* And I said *oh, you mean the dinner that they're cooking?* And John T. is kind of going *do you know what's going on?*

Fourteen restaurants in Louisville had signed on and fourteen of my colleagues who are food writers from Southern Foodways Alliance--connected to Southern Foodways Alliance had agreed to come to Louisville to--to do this event for me. Brown Foreman, the--the company that makes all these wonderful liquors from Kentucky had agreed to--to provide money for the SFA to have their Board Meeting in Louisville and put up all these chefs to come in. And--and so they had this night in February where [**Emotional**]--where these fourteen restaurants did special meals and contributed the money to my--my upkeep and taking care of me. And they advertised it in Louisville and the Mayor declared it *Ronni Lundy Day*, which is pretty hysterical. And there were all these articles written about it, and I suddenly started getting checks from people all around the world, including a friend of mine from Atlanta who I had been elementary school and high school with and hadn't seen for 10 years who sent me a very substantial check to live on for a year.

The benefit provided me with my livelihood for the next year and a half while I was in recovery. It paid for my doctors' bills; it paid my housing expenses; it allowed me to replace a broken computer with a new computer so I could begin to write again to earn my own money. It--it put food on our table. But that's not the half of it. What happened is I--I mean here's--here's Natalie Dupree and--and I don't even want to start naming names because I'm afraid I'll leave somebody out. But the Lee Brothers come down with oysters--they bring oysters and they're--and they're standing in--in Lynn's Paradise Cafe parking lot cooking oysters and--and--and I had been the restaurant critic for two years at the *Courier Journal* in Louisville. I must have not have been too harsh, you know [**Laughs**] and--and some of these people who had restaurants didn't even know me personally; they just knew me from--from writing and they stepped up to the plate, because--also because Louisville has this incredible--not only do they have these

outrageously incredible restaurants but they have this spirited collegiality that's unbelievable. So--so all these people step up to the plate.

So that morning, I woke up in my bed and--and it's not always a good--no, it always a good thing when you wake up when you're a cancer patient because you go *oh good, you know I woke up*, but then immediately you're faced with your--you know some mornings I woke up and looked at my death in the face, you know or--and some mornings you just wake up and the chemo and the surgery and--and everything else is going on. You realize that you're not getting out of bed that day.

I woke up on the morning of this benefit, and I was lying in my bed and I could feel that I was being lifted up on the hands of all the--all these people, all these people--all their hands were lifting me up in the air. And then of course being a good Southern girl, the image immediately began--became a high school football field and they're running me down to the goal post. They were lifting me up and were running down to the goal post and the cheering and the lights were everywhere and I'm just like *oh my God*. It was just this breathtaking experience.

So that morning what I did was I had a list of all the restaurants, so I called all the restaurants so I could talk to the owners and the chefs and--and thank everybody. You know I was calling to thank them but what was happening instead was every time I'd call I'd get a little shot of--of love and support and--and--and--and I was just like--it was like Christmas. I was like a lunatic, you know. I was--and I got--I got--I showered and I got dressed up like I was going to the party, and I did go to the party. My friend, one of my dearest friends, Sandy Phillips in Louisville said *Jim is taking his camera and he--he'll go home and download pictures and I'm taking my cell phone*. So she took her cell phone and everywhere she went--she went to all these different places and every--and then everybody came to Lynn's Paradise Cafe after supper to

have oysters and--and drink. And so Sandy just took her cell phone and passed it around. She didn't even know where her cell phone was. People were coming up to her she had never met before going *are you Sandy; should I give this back to you?* And I'm talking to you know--I'm talking to my--my daughter and her boyfriend drove up to Louisville to go to the event in my stead, you know and so she's taking the phone around to my friends and the people from SFA. And here all these--here's all these people, my--my beloved friends, my family you know this family that's gathering around the table and it's--it's not only--I mean it's like the family I had always dreamed of--not just the people who were close to me that I know who know my history but like my parents would have invited strangers in and--and their friends in to sit at the table and everybody is at the table.

And so the final image that I had--the final realization that I had was that in *Peter Pan*, the--the TV show that had Mary Martin that I watched as a child, there's a scene in *Peter Pan* where *Tinkerbelle* is dying. Her light is fading, and *Peter Pan* turns to the audience, the--out there in television world and says *if you want Tinkerbelle to live clap--clap your hands*, and you know I--children clap all around America [**Claps**]. You could even think that you heard it out the window. Well that's what it was like. I--it was like I was *Tinkerbelle* and all these people were suddenly clapping and I could hear it and my light started to come back inside of me and--and this joy just filled me, this love and joy just filled me and--and all the hopes and prayers. You know for many of these people it was prayer, but for other people it was just energy that they were sending to me. And--and I have learned through my experience that matter is becoming energy and energy is becoming matter, and even what you think is a physical thing can and will change over time.

So I went--then I guess that was in February and I kept having--you know I kept going through chemo and I kept having these fabulous numbers and I kept feeling better and better. I mean we'd--we'd laugh and go *God you look better than you've ever looked in your life you know*. I was--I was lucky; I had a very good bald head, so it was you know. **[Laughs]** And--and my doctor was very puzzled by the fact though that--that the tumor was not decreasing in my liver. And it was also not increasing; it was not doing anything, and so finally in April my doctor said *would you consent to having a needle biopsy done to take core samples out of this mass because there just is the--the slimmest chance that this is not a tumor that we're looking at--that the tumor has gone away and that this is scar tissue?* And I said *yeah, of course*, you know. So I go off to the--to the hospital and it's hilarious. They showed me the--the ultrasounds from my first diagnosis where my abdomen is just riddled with these masses; it was just awful. And then he shows me this last little--nasty little remaining tumor and he takes the core samples. It's scar tissue and I have no cancer; I have no ovarian cancer. And--and I just--I mean there's so many--you know, I had a great doctor. I had terrific chemotherapy. I had a psychological support group, Pathways. I--I go to a clinic called Hope in Asheville that's incredible. I go to a--a therapy group at Pathways that--that works with all these issues. I had a healer, an energetic healer, Jennifer Bruce who helped me. I had strangers at Lark who brought me food. I had people coming out of the woodwork but I had this sudden enormous wonderful family of love and caring and support through the SFA that just stepped up to the plate and--and lifted me up and carried me down the field, and I became a miracle. And I just--this week right now while we're talking is my official 11th--3rd anniversary on October 11th; it's my 3rd anniversary since diagnosis which I'm not even supposed to be here. And I just had my--I just had my checkup and everything is clear. I just had a CT scan; there's nothing--no activity. My blood tests are normal. My blood pressure is

fabulous--everything--all my white and red blood cells are perfect and my doctor said *don't come back for six months*, which is also amazing.

1:12:08.7

AG: That's great.

1:12:09.5

RL: So, and--and yeah, I do--I--I--I believe that the people in Southern Foodways Alliance gave me my life. I do believe that. I know that sounds way over the top and--and--and--and--but--but it's true; it is true. And so this is--this is to me my family. And I'm--I was just going--I was just having this--I'm having this snafu with this--I sold my house in Asheville and I'm traveling. I bought a little motor home to travel around for two years because I--you know, I was having one of those *I'd like to do that some day* and after you've been through what I've been through you always go *what's some day; get--get on it girl*, you know? So--so I'm having these snafus with the--the motor home which has turned out to be a real lemon, and I was driving here and I was being depressed and then I thought *I'm going home. It doesn't matter. I'm going home. I'm going to my family. I'm going to be there*. And--and you know it--it's just again been another joyous occasion where I just feel like I'm--you know I'm home and--and this is where people love me and accept me you know and I do--I just believe in that power and energy of this place above and beyond everything else. And--and I think it is because I--I think it goes back to what John Egerton says. It is because we are gathered around this table where--where everyone is welcome

and everyone--where--where we keep working to break down barriers, you know. It doesn't mean that we don't have our little cat fights. It doesn't mean that we can't be territorial or whatever. But--but this organization embraces not just each other but we embrace life you know and that's an extraordinary thing, yeah.

1:13:57.2

AG: Can you tell me--I know we've been going long, and I need to get somewhere, but can you tell me a little bit about your trip and the plans that you have or are there plans?

1:14:06.4

RL: Well there--there aren't that many plans. There are--there are a couple key destinations. I--I discovered--I have a little booth in Asheville in a--in a very hip little antique mall where I sell kitchen and food-related second hand items and--and that's been real fun for me because it--it--I love second-hand(ing) plus it's also a visual expression. I'm not--I've always been verbal and I'm not a visual artist but it allows me to arrange things and create little color concepts and you know do all this kind of do-da, and I really like it. You know I--it's like making dioramas and you know on--on a large scale. **[Laughs]** And so--so when I decided--when I got this hare-brained idea to--to sell my house and--and hit the road again, which I did in my 20s. I traveled in my very early 20s out--out west and lived in different places and just sort of went wherever it seemed like a good idea to go and I wanted to do that again.

I decided that as a part of that--that I would be buying junk on the road, antiques and junk on the road and then maybe selling them. So I just went to this huge antique sale that happens in East Texas around Round Top, Texas which is okay--you know it, yeah--well all right. Well I went there last spring with my friend, Joni, and it was like--I was stunned. It--it's like Woodstock for antique dealers, you know. It's just this--and there were all these--so I started interviewing of course. I started interviewing the--the dealers and going *well do you have a store; do you do this full-time; what do you do?* And I discovered that there were people who made their living on this circuit. I don't know that I want to make my living on this circuit but I want to participate in it because it is this sub cultural world and it's wonderful and--and really joyful. So I just spent 11 days in a field in East Texas surrounded by these people and--and don't you know that once again what brought us together is we started sharing food.

Let me tell you a little--a quick little story. There was a family in camp next to us who were I think three generations originally from Mexico and--and the younger people spoke English very well. And as the generations went up there was less communication. And one of the women in the middle generation--a little younger than I was but--but a grownup was--was very shy, but she kept coming to my booth. I had a picture that I called *The Madonna of Knoxville*. It was from a Knoxville, Tennessee religious--company that manufactures religious stuff and it was this beautiful Madonna with a child that was old and kind of funky. And she would just come and look at it. She loved it; I could tell that she loved it. And--and after a while I just thought *well I'm not supposed to sell this; it belongs to her*. You know so one day I went over--I took it over to her and communicated to her. She asked me once how much it was and I gave her a discounted price, but I knew that you know she said *I have to wait until the end of the show*.

So I took it over and I said *you don't buy this. She wants to be with you. You know she needs to be with you.* And she was very touched and about 30 minutes later she came to me with a tall Styrofoam cup and it had hot rice pudding in it that she had just made with cinnamon and raisins and milk and she said *what--do you like rice pudding? Will you take this?* And that was her gift back to me. And I thought *oh my God; everywhere you go it's communion isn't it?* It's just--you know it's just amazing.

And there was another guy, he had--he as a barbecue and oh my God he barbecued all this meat that was unbelievable and my dog--my dog didn't want to leave because everyone kept feeding him their beef brisket sandwiches and stuff. So--so--so I'm going to do that occasionally. I'm going to hit a couple of those things, but that requires me to get--to buy and sell stuff. And I'm also traveling--I'm also writing about my travels and my adventures as a middle-aged former hippie chick out on the road trying to see what's out there, because the whole world of RVs and traveling is starting to change because the baby-boom is--is becoming a part of it.

But when I got--when I got depressed, you know because--because my vehicle is--has been broken--let's see; today I've owned it for 129 days and it's been broken for 55 of those days. And so that's unacceptable and--and I'm arguing with the company to buy it back. You can delete this if you want but it's Air Stream just in case anyone wondered and--and--and I'm fighting with the company to buy it back and it was kind of--it got a little depressing there a few days before I was supposed to come here. And then I thought *oh I'm going to Southern Foodways; it will be great.* And then I thought *oh I don't have anything planned to do. I have to edit the next Cornbread Nation. I'm just going to see if I can rent a place for a month in Oxford.* So that's what I'm doing. It wasn't my plan; it wasn't--I was thinking I'd go onto New Mexico but I'm not--

I'm going to stay here for a month and then I'm going to see what happens from--from there; and so it is very loose--built around certain things.

Like I'll be at Southern Foodways again next year; I will probably go back--I'm hoping to go back to Round Top in the spring if I can find enough merchandise on my travels to make it worthwhile. I'll be house-sitting for a friend outside of Santa Fe from December--mid December until the end of March, which is great. I lived in that area for seven years, so it's--I have friends there and it's a homecoming and it's also a very spiritual thing. And this is--this is a bit--you know the Zen monks that don't go to the monastery but just sort of wonder the earth? Well this is my middle age Southern American hillbilly woman version of this. You know I'm--I won't--I won't suggest for a minute that I'm living out in the elements but I am trying to take what comes to me and try to find the--the value in it, you know and--and to--to take my existence to another level of understanding and being that--that maybe is--.

Oh you know what I'm doing? I'm doing--I'm going back to what Bill Best said; I'm trying to create--I'm trying to morph(ally) realize the community of connection as opposed to a community of things. And you know here's the lesson; the thing that I bought has so let me down, but the connections--they're fabulous. You know they're just--they're--they're lifting me up and carrying me on again. Okay; so that's my little religious spiel you know. **[Laughs]**

1:21:06.1

AG: No, that's--that's wonderful. Okay; one more question.

1:21:10.4

RL: Yeah.

1:21:10.7

AG: And then I'll let you get on with your day. It's been great.

1:21:14.6

RL: Well you can tell I'm--I'm kind of reticent, and it's hard to get me to talk.

1:21:16.8

AG: No; I love talking with you; it's great. Getting back to food and Southern food more--more specifically, if--what is your ideal? Do you have an ideal Southern--if I came to you and said *Ronni what is your--serve me your favorite Southern meal* what would be the--?

1:21:36.3

RL: There--I--the first answer is this; it would be summer and everything that we would be putting on the table would have come from our garden or a neighbor's garden or, to be more realistic in this time and age, the farm market. And it--it would have corn cut off the cob and cooked in bacon grease simmered low--slow in bacon grease and then it would have green

beans--real white half-runners, not--not the ones that are being sold commercially now because they're being bred for the wrong reasons, but an heirloom from Bill Best. That's what it would have, and that would be a green bean that would have a big bean in it and be good and meaty. It would have fresh tomatoes and cucumbers and real cornbread without, of course, any sugar in it and it would have squash and it--you know there would be some variety type vegetable, some--if--squash--if there was yellow squash right then that would be there. If there was eggplant it would be something with eggplant. If--if you had to have a meat it would be pork, of course, that had been raised by a farmer that I knew and cured by a farmer that I knew, but you might have fried green tomatoes instead. That--that would serve as a meat, but actually you don't have to have a meat for this--this meal. And there would be iced tea and there would be fresh watermelon and there would be a cobbler. And--and there would just be so many vegetables on the table that you know there's be eight or nine and you'd be--oh there would be my mother's coleslaw which is just made with mayonnaise. And, God bless John T. Edge, it would be Duke's Mayonnaise instead of Hellmann's. You can tell him I have come over to the light, and--and potato salad and all that wonderful stuff and then there would be people around the table who--enough people to eat everything on the table and savor it and love it and tell good stories. And--and that would be the deal.

Now as the seasons change you understand that--that meal would change and--and in winter it would be a really simple meal of soup beans which are--for mountain people that is pinto beans. If you're having navy beans you're having bean soup. But if you're having soup beans you're having pinto beans, and there would be a sweet onion sliced on the side or maybe a green onion from somebody's winter garden if--if that was happening and some sort of relish or pickles and a big glass of milk and hot cornbread, a big hot wedge of cornbread and momma's

coleslaw would be there again with that meal and things that had been put up--anything that had been put up by the aunts and that would be--that would be that meal. You know there are different meals that--at different times of the year.

It's hard--it's hard to pin it down and since--since my horizons have broadened as well I've added more deep Southern things like lady cream-peas, oh--hmm, God they should be on any--anybody's list or purple hull peas, you know and--and green--and oh in the--in the winter meal you would have kale greens because I'm from the mountain South, so we--we did kale and not collard. But you'd have--you'd have a winter green on the table and then you'd have mashed potatoes on the table and you would put the mashed potatoes on the plate next to the greens, so that when you did your fork, you'd scoop up a little bite of each which is--which is a nod to our Irish history. In Colcannon, you know, which is--is the green and the--and the potatoes cooked together. Okay; I've got to stop. I know--I know and we're starving now and--and we'd have to keep going on for hours. And then there's the meal that you have on the third Thursday, you know. **[Laughs]**

1:25:45.2

AG: I will--I will--one more thing.

1:25:46.1

RL: Uh-huh.

1:25:46.8

AG: The radio shows that they're starting through SFA called *Cornbread Nation*; they asked me to have each person do a little riff where I would example--for example say *this is April Grayson. I love butter beans and fried okra and you're listening to Cornbread Nation*. So I was wondering if you could contribute to that.

1:26:07.8

RL: Sure.

1:26:08.4

AG: Make up your own.

1:26:09.3

RL: I've got it. You ready? This is Ronni Lundy and I love soup beans with real cornbread--no sugar added, and you're listening to *Cornbread Nation*.

1:26:20.3

1:26:21.4

AG: Great; thank you so much.

1:26:45.5