

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021



Molly Taylor
Bywater American Bistro
New Orleans, Louisiana
* * *

Date: July 2, 2021
Location: Bywater American Bistro - New Orleans, Louisiana
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Transcription: Technitype Transcripts
Length: Eleven minutes
Project: COVID-19 Oral History Project

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

Rien Fertel: This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is July 2nd, 2021, just after 3:30 in the afternoon. I'm at Bywater American Bistro, and this is kind of the check-in, catch-up, second round of talks.

I'm with Molly Taylor. Why don't we start by just tell me how you're doing. That's how we started back in October when I first talked to you.

å

[00:00:26]

Molly Taylor: We're doing pretty well. I mean, things—I feel like we've always had a good team here. It's kind of like—it's a little strange how everything just happened so quickly, like then it was from masks to, all of a sudden, no masks, but we're all pretty good.

[00:00:40]

Rien Fertel: Yeah. When did the mask rule change here in this restaurant?

[00:00:46]

Molly Taylor: Well, they announced it, like, twenty minutes before we opened, whenever they did that.

[00:00:51]

Rien Fertel: The city?

[00:00:52]

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

Molly Taylor: Yeah, and then we all kind of weren't ready, so we wore masks, I think, three weeks after the announcement? We just recently—I think it's been maybe a week that we're not wearing them.

[00:01:03]

Rien Fertel: Okay. And so today in July, I think we're exactly one year after you first reopened. I think you reopened on July 1st. I reread the transcript last we talked. What does it look like from the point of view of customers coming in?

[00:01:20]

Molly Taylor: I mean, I think there's definitely a change from, like, the compassionate understanding that was going on during COVID, but we tend to have, like, great people that come in here, but I definitely do see a little bit of a change back to, like, people expecting things to just be, quote, unquote, "normal," and maybe sometimes not being as understanding or kind, but, in general, it's pretty much the same. We just don't have masks on. [laughs]

[00:01:47]

Rien Fertel: Do any—well, I'll ask [unclear] this, but tell me, you have a new position here at the restaurant. What does that look like? How did that happen? How long has it been?

[00:02:00]

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

Molly Taylor: I really don't want to talk about it.

[00:02:01]

Rien Fertel: Oh, you don't want to talk about it? Okay. [laughs] Well, tell me who—

[00:02:03]

Molly Taylor: Not all the way. Like, not everyone knows what's going on, so—

[00:02:06]

Rien Fertel: Oh, okay, okay, okay. Tell me—well, tell me about—are you still doing outdoor tables? Do you expect that to change? I know that was kind of a welcomed change. What does that look like going forward?

[00:02:23]

Molly Taylor: Yeah, we're going to keep the outdoor tables, I think, inevitably, or forever. Right now it's weird because it's always raining, but we set them up and people are still sitting out there. It's definitely not as—like, you know, before, like, if we had tables out and it was too cold or windy or rainy, people just wouldn't come into the restaurant, but now we can offer them space inside and they'll come in. I don't think they're sitting outside because they're afraid; they're just sitting outside because they like to be outside.

[00:02:50]

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

Rien Fertel: And have you been able to—do you go to restaurants more? Your friends in the industry, do you get to visit their establishments more? How has that changed, like, you personally as a customer?

[00:03:05]

Molly Taylor: I think that I don't—yeah, I'm just kind of living my life now, and we do get to see our friends, which is nice, in the industry, like, how we all kind of take care of each other and, you know, we're all kind of going through the same thing. I think, in general, in the whole just society, I feel like we all haven't had much time to process the trauma, and it was like just the wheel just keeps spinning, and I can see that in a lot of people, where they're just like, "Now I'm just supposed to be happy and okay."

[00:03:38]

Rien Fertel: Need to take a pause?

[00:03:40]

Molly Taylor: Sorry.

[00:03:40]

Rien Fertel: No, no, no problem.

[recorder turned off]

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

[00:03:45]

Rien Fertel: So we were just talking about trauma servers, other people in the restaurant industry might be facing over the past year, year and a half. I mean, in your mind, what can be done to fix that, to heal that? When we talked in October, I asked you, you know, what should be done for the restaurant industry at large, and we talked about, you know, economic fixes, and I think it's smart and right to maybe go beyond that now and think about other things. What would you like to see happen, or maybe what sort of self-care do you do for yourself or do you see others do for themselves?

[00:04:31]

Molly Taylor: I think for me it's like last Monday, Tuesday, my days off, I chose to not go to the beach with my friends like I had planned, and just to stay home and take care of just being calm and peaceful, and I've been writing more music and playing more music. I think, you know, it's hard, because we moved so quickly back into, like, a full, open city, open restaurants, and then we also don't have the staff, so most restaurants are super short-staffed.

So I feel like for me, I mean, I've always been compassionate and kind in restaurants, but now I'm like I have a different standard of service now. Like, I feel like as long as the food is good and I'm treated well, if my water's not full the whole time, if it takes a little longer, if things aren't like tiptop perfect, I don't get upset, not that I really ever did, but I kind of hope that people who are going to restaurants and going to spaces will treat it like that, where it's like we're all just trying to get by. I mean, as far as I know, basically everyone I know that works in a restaurant here is short-staffed. So—

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

[00:05:37]

Rien Fertel: Have you heard of other servers kind of taking that mentality? The only other—it's an ex-[unclear] employee that I've interviewed the second time for this project, and she shared the exact same thing you just shared. Have you talked to others? And how did you kind of come to that decision?

[00:05:59]

Molly Taylor: I mean, I think just in general, I already kind of was like that anyway, but, you know, I just don't—it's just really not that important. Like, to me, I think one of the things that's good about this restaurant is that it's like it's hospitality, and that's what I really am, like, pride myself on doing, where it's like you come in and you feel at home, you're recognized, you're cared for. Like, those kind of things are what makes me want to go back to a place, that and the quality of food, obviously. But, you know, nitpicking those small things, to me it's just kind of a sign of somebody who's just generally unhappy, and I kind of wish that people would just keep that stuff at home, you know.

[laughs]

[00:06:41]

Rien Fertel: I think this is really important to talk about, and at the same time, how do you, like, not kind of feel judgmental towards yourself or kind of blame yourself, like—or do you? Does that kind of like bug or ever pop up in your mind? People, you know, we're supposed to—this is fine dining or casual, like, we're supposed to go above and

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

beyond, the customer is always right, and we have all these tropes. Does that still come up?

[00:07:12]

Molly Taylor: Well, I've been thinking a lot about kind of when the hospitality industry changed from, like, a guest-host relationship to, like, a guest-serve-type relationship, where it's like, you know, this customer, before, you would be, like, "This is what we offer. Come sit with us. Let us take care of you," and now it's like this—you know, but that changed a long, long time ago. I would hope maybe that people as a whole could start shifting, but, I mean, I don't have a lot of hope for that, but I feel like we kind of—we do that successfully here. Obviously, if someone needed something, we'd take care of them. It is what it is. But I think we're kind of—I personally myself am always trying to create that connection more than, I don't know, some, like, petty, small—obviously, I'm aware of the details. We do that. But I think, in general, what keeps people coming back here is the way that they feel when they're here and the quality of food and the service that we're providing.

[00:08:08]

Rien Fertel: Do you think customers can tell?

[00:08:12]

Molly Taylor: Yeah.

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

[00:08:12]

Rien Fertel: Do you think—okay.

[00:08:13]

Molly Taylor: Yeah. I mean, we have, like, a lot of—I mean, I think one of the reasons, like, I still like to be in the restaurant industry is I really like that I can form these connections with people. It's the same for music that I like, where I can connect with you without, you know, spending lifetimes together or a long time together or anything like that. And people do say that. I mean, we hear every night that it's, like, the best meal they've ever had and that they appreciate the way that they're treated, so that's what, I guess, gives me joy in this industry, just making people—having a space for people to just feel good and enjoy life, really.

[00:08:52]

Rien Fertel: So, right. I'm guessing people aren't feeling, like, cheated, like—

[00:08:54]

Molly Taylor: No.

[00:08:55]

Rien Fertel: —“Oh, the hospitality industry is changing, and I can tell.”

[00:08:58]

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

Molly Taylor: Yeah. I mean, I just wonder—I just think so many people are just burnt out on it, and I don't—you know, I understand that I feel I'm blessed to work in a place like this, and I know that the majority of restaurants aren't that way, so I can understand why people are, like, not wanting to go back. So I don't know. We just really don't know what's going to happen.

[00:09:20]

Rien Fertel: Just one or two more questions. Do you know a lot of people that have just sworn off and said, like, "I'm not going back"?

[00:09:25]

Molly Taylor: I know a few, but they were kind of—did it before, and, yeah, I'm not sure.

[00:09:35]

Rien Fertel: When you said it might be difficult to make these kind of cultural changes in the hospitality industry, do you think those difficulties come from the customers or from, like, managerial positions that just don't want to let go of service that they might be used to?

[00:09:53]

Molly Taylor: I think that it comes from habit, and we're all used to things being a certain way. It takes—it's kind of the same way I feel about politics, where it's like when

Interview of: Molly Taylor
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Interview Date: July 2, 2021

you start thinking about the greater things that are happening in the world, it's very overwhelming, but if you can work within the, like, small microcosm of your community, you can start making those changes, let them start to spread out. So it's like if we can do positive things here with guests and with our staff, hopefully that can spread, you know. I think that's all we can really do, because obviously we can't change everyone's mind or everyone's attitudes immediately, but I think little steps change. And for me, mostly it's about being positive, being compassionate towards each other on both sides.

[00:10:40]

Rien Fertel: I think that's a really beautiful place to end. I want to thank you for talking to me again.

[00:10:43]

Molly Taylor: Thank you. It was good to see you. [laughs]

[End of interview]