



Maggie Marx
New Orleans, Louisiana

Date: July 1, 2019
Location: Royal Street, New Orleans, LA
Interviewer: Justin Nystrom
Length: Two hours and nineteen minutes
Project: Career Servers

Justin Nystrom: So, thank you. I'm here, it's July 1st, 2019. I'm with Maggie Marx on Royal Street in the Bywater.

[0:01:06.9]

Maggie Marx: No. In the Marigny.

[0:01:08.7]

Justin Nystrom: No. In the Marigny, on the edge of the Marigny.

[0:01:10.8]

Maggie Marx: In *Marigny*. [Laughter]

[0:01:12.1]

Justin Nystrom: In *Marigny*. And Faubourg Marigny, if we're going to be technical.

[0:01:16.2]

Maggie Marx: Faubourg. [Laughter]

[0:01:17.0]

Justin Nystrom: We're here to talk with Maggie about the Southern Foodways Alliance Longterm Servers Project and how her career will contribute to that collection. My name is Justin Nystrom. I teach at Loyola University New Orleans, and I'm interviewing for Southern Foodways Alliance.

Thank you so much for agreeing to do this and welcoming me into this beautiful home.

[0:01:42.3]

Maggie Marx: You're very welcome.

[0:01:44.0]

Justin Nystrom: So, first thing I like to do when I do an interview is, like, I like to get to know a little bit more about the person in just terms of background, so can you tell me a little bit about kind of your background growing up and, like, where you come from, your people, if you will, as they say in the South?

[0:02:00.5]

Maggie Marx: I grew up in—well, let's see. Actually, I was born in North Carolina, where my father [Josef Marx], who was a musician, was teaching at Black Mountain College, and at—what was I—ten days old, they moved me back up to Hell's Kitchen in New York City, where we lived in, like, a decommissioned church. My mother [Beulah Marx] used to tell me all kinds of scary stories about that. But eventually we moved into this wonderful apartment in Greenwich Village right off of Washington Square Park, and we lived there together until I was two, when my mother divorced my father. But I grew up in that apartment in the Village, and my father being a musician and my mother an artist. And she used to take in—being a single mother raising a child, she would take in college students from nearby colleges like NYU and Cooper Union, and we had a lot of foreign students, all women, because at that point in time, not many people wanted to rent

to foreign people. So I had a great time. I was growing up with all these interesting women from different countries, and got to see what happened when an eighteen-year-old was turned loose in Greenwich Village their first time away from home, which meant that I got to learn a lot of lessons vicariously [Nystrom laughs], which was good for me.

[0:03:36.5]

Justin Nystrom: It is a good way to—I'm probably going to end up knocking this down at some point, so I'm going to—

[0:03:43.2]

Maggie Marx: Like I said, put it wherever you want it.

[0:03:44.2]

Justin Nystrom: And so about what time frame are we talking?

[0:03:49.8]

Maggie Marx: Well, so I moved there when I was two, so that was 1947.

[0:03:55.9]

Justin Nystrom: Okay. So this is kind of a time of a lot of ferment, I guess, in Greenwich Village? There's a lot going on?

[0:04:02.1]

Maggie Marx: Yeah, and everybody was afraid of communists, because I remember getting—well, communists and the atom bomb. We had the FBI kept coming to our house for various things. [Laughter] My mother did rent one room to a woman—this woman and her mother came to look at the apartment, and the mother said something about her daughter was going to be getting married soon and she wanted a place for her to stay where she would be sort of supervised and with an older female presence there, being my mother. And they talked and all of this, and then when she was leaving, she said to my mother, oh, she was very pleased to meet her, and she said, “You’re our kind of people.”

And after she left, my mother asked Dolly, “What did your mother mean by that?”

And she said, “Oh, nothing. She just likes you.”

Well, Dolly was Dolly Bufalino, who was part of a Mafia family, and she was having—there was an arranged wedding being set up, so she was sort of stashed there prior to the wedding so she would not, I guess, have sex with her boyfriend. I’m sure those days had come and passed already.

And then my mother and the woman upstairs were invited to the wedding, which was in Appalachia, or apparently there was, like, a big roundup of Mafia people from this area, and there was a big spread in *Life* magazine about it, and there was Dolly Bufalino. And then she was in the newspaper and she was the mystery woman that nobody knew who she was, and I can’t remember the name of the guy she married, but he was, like, a white slaver or something. It was just really quite tricky. [laughter] So my mother and the woman upstairs really kicked themselves that they hadn’t gone to this wedding, and the

FBI showed up at the house wanting to investigate what our connection was with this woman, which was really serendipitous. It was nothing.

[0:06:27.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:06:28.9]

Maggie Marx: So there was a lot of Mafia stuff going on. I went to school, I think, with Joe Bonanno's son in public school in the Village, and it was, like, the end of the beatnik era, and I don't know which one, what came after that, but that's what that was like.

[0:06:52.3]

Justin Nystrom: It sounds like a kind of a colorful, interesting time.

[0:06:56.6]

Maggie Marx: It in a colorful, interesting place.

[0:06:57.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So you go to school there, I mean high school, and then you went off to college, right?

[0:07:09.8]

Maggie Marx: I went to college in Vermont. It was the beginning of my 180-out phase.

[laughter]

[0:07:18.7]

Justin Nystrom: Where did you go?

[0:00:00.0]

Maggie Marx: Marlboro College. They had a music festival, which ended up being run by Pablo Casals, and my father would routinely play there in the summertime, so he knew the whole music faculty and all of that. And he wanted me to go there, because they would take—if they thought you were smart enough, they’d let you in even if your grades weren’t great, and whereas I’d had in high school great grades, then I got bored with the whole thing and I wasn’t playing along. So they suggested that I go off and check out Marlboro College, and I said, “If you think I’m going to school on top of some mountain in Vermont, you’re out of your mind.” But when I got up there, it was so beautiful. I ended up—well, I went to school for maybe a year and a half or two years, and then we had a whole, you know, student uprising with the faculty, and I quit. And my girlfriend said, “Let’s go to California.” [Laughter]

“Okay.”

So we sort of announced to our respective parents that we were going to go to California, and my parents wanted me to go be psychoanalyzed because clearly I was out of my mind. And I couldn’t really explain to them why I wanted to do this, and finally I said, “Well, actually, I think it’s just that I want to go and see if I can take care of myself, by

myself, while my parents are still around, so if I really screw up, somebody will bail me out.” So that’s what I did. I quit college and went to California. Ended up living in Sausalito, went to a Ken Kesey acid test. [Laughter] I was twenty.

And then I had to come back for a medical procedure, and I decided to go back to school. Oh, my roommate had gotten evicted, tried to kill herself. It was like I just left all my stuff. I left everything there. It was just, “I’m just going to go back to college and finish something that I started.” So that’s what I did.

[0:09:41.7]

Justin Nystrom: So what did you do? When did you eventually find your way to working in a restaurant?

[0:09:50.8]

Maggie Marx: Probably it was in—okay, I’m in college and a girlfriend of mine—I ended up—I have a degree in theatre, and I always jokingly say it’s—so I was a theatre major and I ended up working in restaurants in Vermont, which is the natural flow of things, and when it was all said and done, I thought, you know, “I think I’ll probably have a better shot at making a living in the restaurant business than being onstage.” But it has a very good aspect that no matter where you go, people eat, so if you’re good at what you do, you can travel anywhere you want and you can work and support yourself. So that’s how it all started.

[0:10:40.8]

Justin Nystrom: And so from very early on, you had an idea that this might be something you could make a career doing?

[0:10:47.7]

Maggie Marx: No, I think I arrived at that out of desperation. [Laughter] You don't have a plan in your head. So I went back and I finished school and got my degree, and then through a series of circumstances, I drove to Key West, Florida, with another girlfriend, and while I was down there, I got hooked—I'd been in a car accident and I had no job at that point in time, so my car was totaled, I was unemployed, and when she said, "You want to drive to Key West?" Because we had two gay friends from Vermont who were very closeted in Vermont, and they'd bought a house in Key West and they invited us to come and stay.

So we took off, and for me, it was just I had nothing else to do. I had no money. I think I borrowed \$200 from somebody and drove to Key West and ended up getting hooked up with some charter boat, deep-sea charter boat captain. And then we came back up to Vermont. She went back to Vermont. I stayed there until the summer began and we came back up to my house and stayed for the summer, and then I rented out the house and went back to Key West, and then I lived there for thirteen years.

[0:12:22.1]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow. So this was the beginning of a long—

[0:12:24.3]

Maggie Marx: Right.

[0:12:25.5]

Justin Nystrom: —a long stint.

[0:12:26.9]

Maggie Marx: And I think that—actually, I started before that, because I worked on Martha’s Vineyard when I was still in college. The girl I rode to California with, she introduced me to Martha’s Vineyard, where her family had lived for several generations. Her parents were both teachers at Harvard, so it was a very interesting group of people in a very rural area, were very highly educated. [Laughter] And that’s the first job I had in the restaurant business, was—

[0:13:06.5]

Justin Nystrom: What kind of restaurant was it?

[0:13:07.9]

Maggie Marx: I’m trying to think which one I did first. I worked in Woods Hole one summer at PJ’s Dairy Freeze, Woods Hole being called the brain drain on England for Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute.

[0:13:21.6]

Justin Nystrom: The laboratory there, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:13:23.5]

Maggie Marx: Yes. So there are all these British scientists there, and they would come to PJ's Dairy Freeze, where when you were behind the counter, you had to take the order, describe the food, take the order, cook the food, and serve the food, and cashier the whole transaction. And you had to have experience. Well, I had no experience, and I thought—but I knew how to cook, and I thought, "They have to tell me what they want me to do and show me where it is [Laughter], and so then I can probably do this." And I went to work, and they had three different shifts. I ended up being the person, they trained me in all three shifts, and I filled in for everybody's days off, so I knew all three shifts.

And, of course, I had lied about experience, and then one day I was sitting with the owner—I think her name was Jenny—and somebody was talking about her sister-in-law who worked there as well, and she said, "Well, there you go. That's why I only hire people with experience, because she's driving me crazy, and, for instance, you're a wonderful employee, but, you know, it's because of your experience."

And I thought, I know the woman really likes me, but I don't want her to go on under this delusion that I had all this experience, because she won't give somebody else a chance.

So I came clean and I told her, I said, "Now, I didn't have any experience. You told me what you wanted me to do, and that's what I did."

And then I went from that over to the Vineyard. I was also underaged [Nystrom laughs], and I went to work at Munro's Boston House, which was the same thing. I lied. But the same thing, "They have to show me what they want me to do." And so I went to work

there, and that was in Oak Bluffs in Martha’s Vineyard, and it was a fairly fancy restaurant for that area.

So I don’t know what I was, maybe nineteen, and you had to be twenty-one to drink in Massachusetts at that point in time. And I remember at some point, somebody coming in the kitchen going, “You know, you’re waiting on the ABC [Alcohol Beverage Control],” which is alcohol, right, tobacco, all that.

And I went, “Oh, shit,” you know? [Laughter] But, like I said—well, I had matured physically at an early age, so I looked older than I was, and it all went off without a hitch. So I would come in the summer. I did several summers like that and then I quit the college, and then we drove to California. And, actually, I worked—I didn’t work in a restaurant there; I worked in a gift shop on a ferry boat in Sausalito. And then I came back because I had to have a medical procedure. My mother wanted me to—you know, she wanted to be there, being my mother.

[interruption]

[0:16:52.2]

Maggie Marx: So then Chuck and I went back up to Vermont, and then we went back down to Key West, and he didn’t want me to work. We didn’t have any money.

[Laughter] It’s like, “I’m not that person.”

[0:17:07.4]

Justin Nystrom: This was a boyfriend, I guess?

[0:17:08.7]

Maggie Marx: Yeah, the charter boat captain.

[0:17:09.8]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, okay, okay.

[0:17:11.0]

Maggie Marx: And so really I wanted to work. I needed to do something and feel, you know, useful, and so he finds—I worked in a Mrs. Biddle’s Candy Store, and that was dreadful. And then I went to work on this houseboat restaurant, which actually had a very interesting, auspicious beginning where it was a houseboat that was—there was an area, Houseboat Row, they called it, out by the airport, and there were all these people who—mostly hippie-type people who lived on houseboats out there. And all of the righteous people in Key West were very concerned about that because these people were not paying property taxes and all of this, and weren’t having to carry the same load that the others were.

And one night, there was this houseboat that was occupied by bikers, and the boat was called the *Proud Mary*. And the local policemen, the Conchs, decided that they would take care of this nuisance, and they took a backhoe and they sank the boat. Well, then there was a member of the police force, whose name I guess I won’t mention who came—had been out of town—he came back and discovers that his houseboat has been

sunk by his compatriots in the police department, and so now they're all falling over themselves trying to figure out how to fix this, and it's "Bubbaville" down there.

The charter boat dock, where my boyfriend worked, they had private boats on one side and the charter boats on the other side, and there was a long waiting list to get a slip there. It was a very lucrative thing to have. And, all of a sudden, they're towing this funky-ass houseboat in there, into where the backcountry boats were moored, the smaller boats, and there was talking, there was all this buzz, "What's going on? What's going on? How did he get his boat in here? And he's not been on the list," and all of this. Well, because he was a Conch family. And it went through, and here was this boat.

So I ended up, I went to work, because I knew all the people on the dock, and here was the opportunity to work there. And I lost my place. Oh, well, I went to work for George Lassiers, and it was like a sandwich—I said his name—a sandwich shop, only he didn't know what he was doing at all. It just, like, was kind of a nowhere job, but I had a little money coming in and I felt okay about it. I split up with that boyfriend, and then I worked—somebody else took over the business. I remember the second one, I think, was like a raw bar, and I went to work for him. So now I'm shucking oysters, which I'd—I hadn't lied about it. [Laughter] I never claimed to have known anything about that. So then he went out of business. Oh, no. While I was in there, this guy comes in, a strange guy I'd never seen before. I don't know if he was—I don't know what he was. He's telling me that "People have been watching you."

And I'm like, "What do you mean, people are watching me?"

"Well, I'm involved with the Mafia here in Key West, and we're very interested in setting you up in this business."

And I'm like—my mouth is hanging open, and, of course, I'd always been fantasizing about doing it my way. I thought I could do it better than they had been doing it. So he tells me all—shines me on with all this stuff. I said, “Well, let me think about this. Give me overnight to think about this.” I'm thinking about my childhood growing up in Greenwich Village with Bonanno's son in high school. [Laughter]

So I said to the guy the next day, “Well, what happens if I don't want to do this anymore?”

“Oh, no problem. You can just leave.”

And I'm looking at this, I'm thinking, “*Why* do they want me to run this restaurant? Why do they want to buy the restaurant?”

Well, the restaurant, I mean, it's a houseboat. It's floating there. It is right next to a public boat ramp. All kinds of boats come and go out of there, and they're hauling chests of stuff on and off of their boats. And I finally sort of put that together and went, “Okay, great.” And I already had—well, later on, I had misadventures with that anyway. But I said, “Nah, I'll do it the hard way.”

Then I went to work for an Australian woman who was the next person who bought that business, and I was in there talking with her, went to meet her, and she's, like, making somebody a sandwich and she goes over to the refrigerator and picks up a gallon of mayonnaise and carries it over to the counter and puts some on some bread, and she's making this sandwich, and then she carries the gallon back over to the refrigerator. I said, “Have you ever worked in a restaurant before?”

And she said, “No.”

And I went to work for her, and so I was her cook. I mean, I've done everything there is to do in the restaurant business. So I cooked for her, her recipes. She was a very good cook. She was kind of a crazy lady. They fixed the boat up. Before you leave, I'll show you pictures of what this place looked like. It was very funky, and there was, like, a ladder you would climb up to get up to the top deck, which was never really meant for people to be on it in the first place, but also you have to climb up a ladder carrying a tray of food and climb back down, you know, bussing your table and everything, because I ended up waiting tables there as well as cooking. So that went on for a while.

Then her husband—not her husband—her boyfriend that she was in business with, at the end of one year—I think I worked there for maybe four years for them, and I said, “We haven't gotten our W-2 forms yet. I kind of want to get on top of this and get it done.” She gets this tense look on her face. Well, there were no W-2 forms because he had taken all the withholding and put it in his pocket because he was tight for money. And I'm like, “But that's stealing. You're stealing. I mean, okay, don't pay the government, but don't take *my* money and put it in your pocket, then you're not meeting or doubling the Social Security payment you're supposed to be putting in. But at least give me the money. What am I making, \$3 an hour or something? [Laughter] I mean, it's really stupid.” And I finally told her—and this was over a period of weeks—I just said, “I'm outta here. I'm done.”

And she said, “Maggie, please don't leave. Please don't leave.” She said, “I'm kicking him out, and I really want you to stay, and I want you to be my manager.”

Well, it's always nice when somebody wants you to work for them, let alone run their business. Well, I wasn't actually running the business, but I ran the kitchen. And so I did that.

And then a year and a half later, the boyfriend shows up again, and I said, "No, I am just not doing this." Once burned, twice shy. And so I quit.

Now, meanwhile, I'm involved with another guy who used to work for the Shah of Iran [Laughter], which came from—he famously told his family when he was eighteen that he was tired of being told what to do, so his solution was he was going to join the Marines, which was a very humorous concept to everyone. So he goes off and he does this, and he's, like, in the Vietnam War with minesweeping and stuff. He's one of the people who's the least fazed by their time in Vietnam of anybody I've ever known. I don't think he saw that many awful, horrible things, but the thing he was doing was insane. And then that was up and he joined the Peace Corps, and then that was up and he really didn't want to leave Iran, so he went to work for the Shah. [Nystrom Laughter] And then I guess he was accused of being in a kickback scheme with Snap-on tools. Oh, he was in procurement for the Iranian Navy.

So he got fired from his job and had taken a correspondence course in sailing, ended up buying a sailboat and getting his girlfriend to come over from the States, and they sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in this boat based on his correspondence course in sailing. But this man is one of those people, if I ever had to be dropped off at a deserted island, he's the person I would want to be there, because he could just make things work. He was amazing, and he could do celestial navigation and all that stuff. So he always had a fantasy of owning a boat, and then so he knew about the restaurant where I worked with

his former girlfriend. And then he and I got hooked up, and then she and I had to have a big drinking, talking, crying conversation [Laughter] to get through this. We're still friends to this day, all of us are.

So the Australian woman who had the restaurant came to me and asked me if—oh, first, she came because the boat was sinking, and my boyfriend was the boat person. He really knew about boats. So we raised the boat, and I'm the little girl from Greenwich Village. What do I know about boats? But I learned a lot [Laughter] between the charter boat thing. We had taken a charter boat, a wooden boat that had been in dry dock forever, and put it in the water and were getting it ready to run charters. And you had to stay in the boat because it could sink if you're not—because the wood shrinks and the water comes in. Anyway, in Greenwich Village, we didn't do a lot of that.

[0:29:20.9]

Justin Nystrom: No, not a lot of call.

[0:29:23.5]

Maggie Marx: No, not for that kind of thing. So, raised the restaurant, and he temporarily fixed the hull. What had happened was the boat, because it moves with the tide, the stern of the boat was plywood, and Plexiglas had been put up around the bottom, but only up about ten inches, which was fine when it was a houseboat, but you put all this refrigeration and stuff in there and now the whole boat is sitting lower in the water and the wood was starting to rot. And a stick got wedged behind the boat and the wind was blowing, so it kept banging the stick into the stern, poked a hole through it, and it sank all

the way to the bottom, but it was not very deep there. They called it “Suicide Supper.” There were people who had been sitting there eating, but it went down very slowly [Nystrom laughs], so there was nothing real—it was very scary, but not dangerous. People were hanging onto it because it kept tilting over. [Laughter] So it’s sitting on the bottom, and I actually went in there. That was the second time. And I have pictures of that. So I’m standing up to my waist in water, so I knew that if the boat was on the floor of the body of water, you could walk around in it. Anyway, we fix the boat and tell her it’s not fixed. “It’s a temporary fix. You need to have it pulled, and we’ll help you.” She didn’t have any plywood. He found somebody with plywood for her. We sent her off, she did nothing. The boat sank again.

And then she came to me and asked me if we would buy the boat, and so we’re like, “Hmm.” So we went around.

It’s a long story. [Laughter] I don’t know if you want to dwell on this, but we end up buying the boat and rebuilding the boat. So now [Laughter] I am making all the recipes for a restaurant, I am designing the restaurant, I am designing the kitchen, because he—we’re both terrified. I mean, I’ve never even taken a—I don’t know what a business plan is. I’ve never even seen a business plan. I’ve never written a business plan, and I’ve seen all these people I know—you can lose your ass in the restaurant business. It’s got the highest failure rate of almost any business you can go into. But I knew a lot of the things not to do, like not to not pay the IRS, because when we actually finally bought the boat, I sat down and I think I wrote seventeen checks. We paid off all of her vendors, all of the supply people. She didn’t even know how much she owed, and we said, “How much do you owe?”

“I don’t know. I can’t bear to look at it. I just—.”

And we said, “You can’t not bear to look at it. That’s not going to happen.”

So I guess somebody went through the whole thing and figured out what it was, and then I remember him telling her, “Every hour that you do nothing about this—.” And she had a house. She was about to lose her house. “Every hour is costing you 15.50, every hour, twenty-four hours a day, day after day after day.”

So I said...

And he and I had discussed—I said I didn’t want her to lose her house, so we figured out if she quoted a price to us for the business, and that wasn’t going to make it, we figured out that if she found her old boyfriend and got him to kick in another three-grand and we kicked in an extra three-grand over the asking price, that we could pay off all of her debts, and then she would still have her house. So that’s what we did, which is funny, because this whole story came into play just before [Hurricane] Katrina here with another business that would have been bought from the IRS, but we didn’t do that.

Anyway, so we opened the restaurant, and we had all these carpenters that I was feeding. And it was a seafood restaurant, because I got a lot of fish, which you were not supposed to do, from the charter boat fish, because I knew all the charter boat captains and I knew all the mates that cleaned the fish. So if it had been—I mean, most people buy fish in the grocery store or frozen or whatever, and I didn’t ever eat much fish till I went to Key West, and it was like I discovered a whole new thing. It was so delicious. And if it had been bad weather with thunder and lightning and rain and the boats hadn’t been able to go out, that meant I had to go to a fish market to buy fish, which, to me, was buying old

fish. I was totally spoiled, I mean, never mind the grocery store adds another element of time lapse between when that fish was killed and when you're seeing it.

And one day, we had no fish because it had been raining, and it was in the afternoon, these people came in, these tourists came in, and they ordered fish. And the charter boat next to us is just pulling in, and we're going, "Okay, fine. Sure, fish, all right."

Get off, run over there and go, "Do you have any fish you can sell?"

And he goes, "Yeah." He takes out a snapper from an icebox, and it's still alive. He filets the fish on the—it was a fish stand there, fish-cleaning stand—filets the fish. I take it back in the restaurant, cook it, and we serve it to these people. So your fish was alive twenty minutes ago.

[0:35:46.7]

Justin Nystrom: Wow.

[0:35:46.7]

Maggie Marx: You can't get better than that.

[0:35:50.4]

Justin Nystrom: [Laughter] It's pretty tough, yeah.

[0:35:51.6]

Maggie Marx: So then we did that. Well, I think our initial commitment was four years. Somewhere in there, too, we split up. Well, the way it started out was because the lease

was from the city, from the dockmaster's office, and that's mostly what we bought, a lease and we bought this broken-down boat.

So I lost my place again. Whatever. Oh, they want us—that's what I wanted—they wanted us to be open in the morning for the charter boat people so they could get box lunches to take out, which is like the mornings are the least lucrative times for making money. So we had to do that, but we had to be open at night to make money, so we just opened breakfast, lunch, and dinner seven days a week, and in the beginning, my boyfriend was not working there, just me, so I ran the restaurant for six months, breakfast, lunch, and dinner seven days a week up until I just said, “[demonstrates].” I was a blithering idiot. “I can't do this anymore.”

So he was a perfectly good cook, so we kind of conscripted him into working in the restaurant, so then we did that together for years. You shouldn't live with someone and run a business together seven days a week for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. [Nystrom Laughter] It just doesn't make for a good relationship. So finally I said, you know, “I don't want to do this anymore.” So we split up, but we continued to run the restaurant, and we did that for another couple of years. And then I said, “No, I really don't want to do this anymore. You should be able—if you split up with your loved one, you should not have to work together all the time.”

So he agreed to do that. Well, what he said was, “Well, okay. Yeah, I understand that. We can do that. Just don't tell anybody.”

I said, “Well, how are we going to sell a restaurant if we don't tell anybody that's it's for sale?”

So finally we told, and, actually, we didn't sell the restaurant right then. We showed it to a lot of people who didn't have the money, or most of them didn't know anything about the restaurant business. And then I don't know why, maybe he just wanted to get me out of there, but he offered to buy me out and I said, "Okay," and he bought me out. And then he found a buyer not long after that, and I remember him telling me, because we still were—like I said, we're still friends. This guy, he'd never run a restaurant, he'd never worked in a restaurant. He sold restaurant equipment, which is like, "I once knew someone who ate in a restaurant," and now that doesn't count. [laughter]

And so I guess my boyfriend went in there one morning—oh, would pay the people, our longtime staff people, to stay with the new owner for a while so that, you know, he wouldn't be just hung out to dry. So he's telling my boyfriend, he said, "Oh, you won't believe what happened."

"What happened?"

"I came in the other morning and the waitress from the night before was passed out on the bar on top of all the money from the cash register." [Laughter]

And my boyfriend says, "Well, welcome to the restaurant business." [laughter] That's not bad at *all* in the scheme of things.

So he didn't make a run of it, and then he sold it to somebody else. It's still there. Now it's a Thai restaurant, but they moved it away from that dock or the—yeah, the launch ramp.

Can we stop for a minute so I can—

[0:40:23.3]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

[recorder turned off]

[0:40:26.7]

Justin Nystrom: And we're back, and I guess we're going to transition at some point, we're going to transition, I guess, from Key West, where you really earned your bones as a do-it-all kind of restaurateur, cook, waiter.

[0:40:40.9]

Maggie Marx: Oh, my girlfriend and I did the wiring for the restaurant.

[0:40:44.8]

Justin Nystrom: So you did a little, like, electrical work as well?

[0:40:46.7]

Maggie Marx: And we did the plumbing for the restaurant. My boyfriend and I did the plumbing. [Laughter]

[0:40:51.5]

Justin Nystrom: So you just have gotten out of the restaurant business.

[0:40:58.7]

Maggie Marx: So where do I want to go? And it had been a fantasy—oh, well, because I had sold my half of the restaurant, I had a little pocketful of money. I knew I didn't want to go back to Vermont and I didn't want to go back to New York City, and I remember when I was about seventeen, I guess that's when I first got interested in jazz, but that was like New York kind of jazz, not trad jazz like New Orleans. But that's when I would hear about New Orleans, and I used to have fantasies about what it must be like to live here, and the music and the sultry weather.

[0:41:38.4]

Justin Nystrom: About what time was this? What year was this, roughly?

[0:41:42.5]

Maggie Marx: This was exactly—oh, that I was having those thoughts or that I moved?

[0:41:47.2]

Justin Nystrom: Both, I guess.

[0:41:48.2]

Maggie Marx: The thoughts were when I was seventeen, so that was '63.

[0:41:55.3]

Justin Nystrom: So you'd thought of New Orleans for a long time.

[0:41:56.4]

Maggie Marx: On and off, but it wasn't a plan, because this house is also something I thought, off and on, of, but it wasn't a plan, and I just had a realization when I was in the house, "Oh, my god, this is exactly what I saw when I was seventeen standing on this porch with the crepe myrtle tree and the thunder and lightning." And OZ [WWOZ radio] was playing, so there was jazz playing. This was like what my fantasy was, but I didn't ever know that I was on this mission, on this trip, which makes me always think that if you could ever figure out what on earth it is you want to do, you could make it happen, but even sometimes you make it happen when you don't realize you're making it happen. It's the figuring out what you want to do that's the problem, I think. Anyway—

[0:42:54.4]

Justin Nystrom: So the year you decide to finally—

[0:42:57.1]

Maggie Marx: To leave there and come here?

[0:42:59.2]

Justin Nystrom: —follow up on this, yeah.

[0:43:01.3]

Maggie Marx: That was 1989, and I booked a flight up here. I didn't know anybody. We used to run—my boyfriend, in the restaurant, leased a motorsailer from a Mississippi

River pilot who—he was born on Bourbon Street, actually. And so he was living in a boathouse just in the east. I think they'd been wiped out before Katrina, if not before, definitely at Katrina, because it was all on pilings. You'd walk out over this rickety thing. So I know that's not there anymore.

Anyway, I flew here. He picked me up, Lucky, Lucky and his wife and his kid, and then they had a cousin. A French cousin was staying there, and he had a car, so he would drive me in and I would look at apartments. And I'd sworn I would never wait tables again, right, because I was a restaurant owner. So I end up, I have all these keys, and it's hot, it's July, and I'm just soaking wet, and I had these keys to an apartment in a house on Dauphine Street between Frenchmen and Elysian Fields. And as I'm walking along, there's a park, and I see the sign with the name of the park, Washington Square Park, and I'm going, "What? This is crazy." And my whole time coming here was like that. Things just came at me like, "You're where you're supposed to be."

And I had a fantasy of what I wanted my apartment to be like, and it had big high ceilings and a balcony with wrought iron or cast iron and crepe myrtle trees or magnolia trees.

Anyway—and this house has got magnolia trees in front of it and a balcony—I go into the house and go up the stairway, and there's a long landing, and there's one, two, three, four, or five doors. And I have all these keys, and I'm just sweating buckets and I'm trying the keys. I cannot open a door to save my life, and finally—and I'm not a violent person—I was so frustrated, I punched a door and it swings open and I'm looking at this huge room, this, like, 20-by-20, and there's a fireplace in it and hardwood floors and fourteen-foot ceilings and windows looking out the balcony over Washington Square Park. The windows go up into the ceiling. And then I've got another bedroom and a

bathroom and a spare bedroom and what I finally, at some point, figured out was probably a back stairway that was my “kitchen,” quote, unquote. What a nightmare that was.

So anyway, I took the apartment, I move in there, and I go back to Key West and arrange—get everything all—the loose ends tied up. I manage property there. I got that taken care of. And two friends, three friends of mine helped me drive up here with a big truck and my car, and we move in. So now we’re going to go out to eat, but I don’t know where anything is, and we go down on Frenchmen Street and there’s the Apple Barrel Bar, and we went to Alberto’s, which was over Apple Barrel Bar. And I’m sitting up there and going, “Well, this is a really cool little space, nice place.”

And we’re having—oh, the waitress comes over and she says, “Hi, my name is Bea. That’s between A and C.”

And I’m going, “Oh, great.”

And I said to Nicky, I said, “And they’re a little crazy here, too, but I like that kind of—you know, that works, because I’m a little crazy too.”

And then Nicky says, “Well, Bea, this is Maggie. She just moved into the neighborhood and she needs a job.”

And I’m going, “I’m never waiting tables again.” [Laughter]

Said, well, she was leaving, but somebody else was going to take her job, yadda yadda. I talk to them, I end up going to work at Alberto’s. Okay. So, Alberto’s, and now I’m telling tales. Well, they’re all dead. Alberto appears to be an Italian man, but, in fact, he’s not. He’s from someplace in South America. I can’t even remember where. He did not speak Italian, which sometimes [Laughter] was problematic when he was carrying on

with people who were Italian who now wanted to, like, sing the national anthem of Italy and he had no idea what the words were. [laughter] And, yeah, he had a great thing going. The food was wonderful. He was a wonderful chef, he was just not such a great person, and he was very drunk all the time.

He's at a table of gray-haired ladies, Uptown ladies, and he's talking to them and he's gesturing and going—and I hear it from the kitchen, I hear, “Psst, psst.”

And I'm going, “What is ‘psst’?”

They're going, “Come here, come here.”

So I go over. They said, “Alberto just dropped a bag of pot on the table.” [Nystrom Laughter]

I go, “What?”

“Yes.”

So I walk by, I scoop up this thing off the table and walk into the kitchen with it and like nothing was happening, and later I'm going, “Alberto, you know, that wasn't cool.”

And he goes, “Oh, they thought it was oregano.” Sure they did.

So I worked with this girl named Chaz who we were really good friends at that point.

And Alberto gets really drunk, and, all of a sudden, he's looking at me, he's going,

“Chaz, Chaz.”

And I said, “Um, I get that you're talking to me, but I'm not Chaz.”

And he says, “Well, you're fired.”

I said, “I'm fired? Okay.” I said, “You do know that I'm not Chaz?”

And then Chaz came over, and then I said—you know, we're talking, and he says, “Well, you're fired too.” [Laughter]

So we're both fired. I have no idea what is going on. I'm waiting on a big table, lovely people. We had a good time together. They had a great time at the restaurant, and they're dawdling. They're done, but I'm just waiting for the check. It's my last table, and I'm going to get a good tip. And I really don't want to be there anymore because I've been fired for I don't know what, and I finally went over, I said, "I'm really sorry. I don't want to interrupt you," I said, "but I just got fired and I would really like to leave, so if you wouldn't mind closing out this bill, I would really appreciate it."

And they're going, "What? You're wonderful. I can't believe that they're—," you know, yadda, yadda.

Oh, I forgot that before that, one Saturday night, he gets into an argument with Mary, his business partner. It's a Saturday night. We're busy. We're like balls to the wall, flying around, and he's pissed off at her. He turns around, he sucker-punches her in the dining room and drops this woman to the floor, and I'm going, "I've never seen anybody do anything like this before." And this was like *de rigueur* with them. It was crazy.

What did I do? Oh, I used to go down and eat at La Peniche, because it was right down the street from where I was living, and I knew Kathy was the owner and I knew guys who worked in there, and she said she had heard that I had lost my job at Alberto's. [Laughter]

Oh, he came to me—no. The first thing that happened, lord, is the Apple Barrel Bar is downstairs. So Phil Esteve owns the building and owned the bar, and he says, "Oh, I heard Alberto fired you and Chaz last night."

I said, "Yeah."

And he said, "Well, I can't believe he did that. I mean, that's ridiculous," and yadda, yadda. And he says, "Look. You want to work here?" He said, "I'd love for you to work

here so every time he goes in and out of his restaurant, he has to see you downstairs in the bar.” [Laughter]

And I said, “Okay.” So I was tending bar, actually, which I had done in Key West also.

So I did that for a while.

Then I’m over at La Peniche and Kathy says, “Do you want to work here?”

Well, it’s really nice when somebody asks you if you want to work for them, and I said, “Sure.”

But I had to work mornings, and I’ve never, ever been a morning person. My brain does not function properly, but I thought, “I need to have some money coming in.”

So I worked there for about a year, and then a local guy that I used to wait on for breakfast, he was a maître d’ at Feelings Café over here on Franklin, and he said that they were looking to pick up another waiter for the weekends and would I be interested, and I said, “Very much so,” because this is a really nice restaurant that—well, they had tablecloths, actually, at La Peniche, but Feelings was very elegant.

So I went over and had an interview over there. I told my manager at La Peniche that I’d been, like, headhunted to go have an interview, and I said, “Don’t tell Kathy. I don’t want to freak her out, because I don’t know if this is going to happen.”

So next thing I know, I’ve been taken off of the schedule for going to have an interview.

So now I have no job, and I’m going, you know, I think I was only fired once in my whole life until I came to New Orleans and now I’ve been fired twice in a year

[Laughter], and I don’t know what I did.

So I picked up the job at Feelings—no, they wanted to—I was still at La Peniche because they wanted me to wait on them, so I had to wait on my two potential bosses, which was

all very strange, I thought, anyway, but that went down fine. I would go to work there on Friday and Saturday, and then as you do when you want to work in a restaurant and you're partway in the door, you start offering to pick up people's shifts when they can't work so that you become more familiar with the whole place and you're better at what you're doing and you become part—you have an instant dysfunctional family. Same when I went to work at Alberto's. I didn't know anybody here. I had moved to the city not knowing a soul, and I had an instant family of very dysfunctional people [Laughter], but it's your family. Now, you know, there's people to talk to and go out and have a drink with and whatever. So now I'm at Feelings Café, and I worked there for fourteen years.

[0:55:54.9]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow, wow. Who were some of the other waiters there? Was it mostly women or mostly men or a little of each?

[0:56:04.5]

Maggie Marx: A little of each, more women than men. One of them was Amy Archinal, who did this painting. There was a movie, *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*, and the main character is a woman who is a painter, and all her paintings are on the walls in her New Orleans house, except the paintings on the walls were all Amy's paintings. And I was working with Amy. Amy was an artist who also had to eat, so she was waiting tables. And I guess there'd just been a review—I can't remember his name—by the food editor for *The Times-Picayune*, whoever it was in 1989.

[0:56:46.6]

Justin Nystrom: Gene Bourg?

[0:56:49.1]

Maggie Marx: I don't think so.

[0:56:51.8]

Justin Nystrom: Okay.

[0:56:53.4]

Maggie Marx: I don't recall. But anyhow, he'd given them a very favorable review, and the place was just jam-packed. There were people waiting in the—what do we call it now—a dive bar, in the Apple Barrel, waiting *hours* to come upstairs and eat, so I was making a lot of money, which, you know, was excellent. It was a good thing, except Alberto was so crazy.

[0:57:23.0]

Justin Nystrom: And these were kind of neighborhood places, in a lot of ways, right, or—

[0:57:27.7]

Maggie Marx: Well, not when this review came out.

[0:57:29.0]

Justin Nystrom: Right.

[0:57:31.0]

Maggie Marx: There were people from all over the city.

[0:57:32.5]

Justin Nystrom: But they were not tourists so much?

[0:57:34.2]

Maggie Marx: No, it wasn't so much tourists. It was local people from all over the city, from Uptown, too, because then I would be in Uptown—that's one of the strange things about New Orleans, its being a big city, that every place you go, you run into people that you know, and when you wait tables, you are interacting with so many people in the course of a week, people that you're one-on-one with, so then you recognize them when you are in a different place.

[0:58:06.2]

Justin Nystrom: So, now, Feelings is located—what's the address of that?

[0:58:09.0]

Maggie Marx: It must be 2600 Chartres Street at the corner of Franklin Avenue.

[0:58:21.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. And so today, nowadays, that would be an area where a lot of tourists, a lot of people from out of town, it's—

[0:58:28.8]

Maggie Marx: Today, I don't know. See, it was sold recently. So it had a very steady clientele when I was there, a combination of tourists and local people. Something that I noticed in New Orleans and I haven't noticed anywhere else is that there's a large number of residents, old New Orleans families, that have been here all their lives and they're now fairly well off or they were well off, and they eat out all the time. There are *lots* of these people who eat out every night of the week, but every night, depending on the night, it's a particular restaurant, so it could be Commander's Palace on Fridays and, you know, Upperline on Saturdays. Well, Feelings was in that roster. And these people eat the same food in each respective restaurant on that respective night. I've never seen this before, but it is very prevalent here. So we had a lot of those people. And then it had a large gay clientele, and it was always written up in *Gambit* as the most romantic restaurant in New Orleans or most romantic place to take a date.

It was a great restaurant. They were doing a really good thing. Since it was sold, they're now on their third or fourth iteration, and they keep fixing it and then closing, because if they would just do what we were doing all along—the restaurant was there for over thirty years with the same people running it, with pretty much the same menu, which everybody pooh-poohed, but they were running it for thirty years and making a lot of money in a

beautiful place. And they used to always say that they never fired anyone. I don't know that that was a good management rule to follow.

[1:00:47.9]

Justin Nystrom: What makes you say that?

[1:00:49.9]

Maggie Marx: Because there was stuff going on that should not have been going on. [Laughter] I didn't know about this, even at the time, but there was a waiter there that, of course, we all knew that he was changing the credit card slips to raise his tips. And he'd worked at some other very well-known restaurants in this city. I think he's no—all these people are dead, which is—I mean, I was older than all of them [Laughter], so it's, like, kind of frightening to think, huh, I'm telling these stories and none of them still here. That, and people just helping themselves to booze through the course of the evening, that kind of thing.

[1:01:42.5]

Justin Nystrom: What would you say your persona is as a waiter? Do you have a persona? Are you always just you?

[1:01:51.8]

Maggie Marx: No, I think who I am changes with who I'm waiting on. Well, I'm always me, but I don't tell jokes. I'm not the joke-telling person. I like to put in a little humorous

one-liner here and there. I try not to interject myself into their conversation, but to be available always, to try to—you know, if they have something in particular they're looking for, I try to help steer them to what I think they would like. But I'm not trying to—it's their party; it's not my party. And if we become friends along the way, that's fine, and that's happened a lot.

The last place I worked was Three Muses, which was billed as the hottest new jazz club in town, and we were all bartenders. However, somebody had to wait on the people on the floor. And, of course, everybody I worked with was much younger than I was and everybody wanted to be the bartender, and I thought, I'm not a competitive bartender. I'm not a competitive waiter. I just don't work that way. And so it's like, "Y'all—." And it's all women. I said, "You can all fight over the bartending thing and I'll take care of the tables," but I couldn't take care of *all* the tables by myself, which I ended up doing often, but I can't do that for extended period of time, because I was in my sixties then.

But what I did notice was since I let my hair go natural, so now I'm in this restaurant, and at that point in time, Frenchmen Street was being billed as the adult Bourbon Street, so there were a lot of older people, tourists, coming here, and they would come to Frenchmen Street for the older crowd. They would come through that door and they would see me and they all come straight to me because I was the only one in there with gray hair, is my theory. I mean, but I really believe in my theory that they thought I was like one of them and that they could ask me questions about where to go and to be safe as an older person or whatever. It was interesting. But that gave us sort of an instant camaraderie.

[1:04:27.7]

Justin Nystrom: That’s interesting. It was like you had the secret handshake.

[1:04:33.9]

Maggie Marx: Right, and then—because people talk about my ring. I had this ring, because I had my hands in front of people all the time, and the jewelry I would wear, it’d be something, “Oh, I really like your ring.” And then they’d ask me about it, and then you break the ice, and then you’re having a conversation, and they have no idea that I have steered them into this conversation.

[1:04:54.2]

Justin Nystrom: So this is sort of a trademark. Where did you buy that ring?

[1:04:57.3]

Maggie Marx: Oh, I got it here. Dr. Bob.

[1:05:05.0]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, “Be nice or leave.”

[1:05:05.9]

Maggie Marx: “Be nice or leave” Dr. Bob [Shaffer] has the same ring, and he used to come into Feelings, and whenever we’d see each other, we’d click rings. He knows—I can never remember the name of the fellow who made it. When I was working at

Feelings, I was tending bar one night and this gentleman came in, and he was wearing a bracelet like this, and it was hinged in the middle. So it was an alligator that was wrapped around his arm, and I was so taken with it, he said, “Well, here, I’ll let you wear it while I’m here,” which was very nice. And I did, and I enjoyed it, and I, when he was leaving, gave it back. And he said, “Well, I’m coming tomorrow night. I have a ring like this.” He said, “I’ll bring that.” And he did, and he let me wear it. And it had a hinged mouth with a pink coral tongue in it, and the only thing I could remember is that it was made by a guy who was the boyfriend of Paula of Paula and the Pontiacs. [laughter] Unfortunately, it seems that, I think, with the combination of stimulants and depressants, he decided that it would be a good idea to smash the moulds one night, so there are no more of—I mean, they were—this was number nine. And then somebody recast them, because Dr. Bob broke his and had a recast of it, but they’re kind of hard to come by.

[1:06:32.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, a very unique piece.

[1:06:34.9]

Maggie Marx: Yes. It’s also—

[1:06:36.3]

Justin Nystrom: Substantial.

[1:06:39.0]

Maggie Marx: Substantial. [Laughter]

[1:06:40.3]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. I'm actually going to pull my phone out and photograph—

[1:06:44.6]

Maggie Marx: Sure.

[1:06:44.8]

Justin Nystrom: —but it needs to be on your finger when I do that.

[1:06:46.8]

Maggie Marx: Oh, okay. [Laughter]

[1:06:48.8]

Justin Nystrom: When Kasimu comes and does the photographs [Marx laughter], I'm going to tell him about the ring, because it's an important trademark. Yeah, I'll take a picture right there. Great. Yeah, no, so you have this trademark ring and you give them their space.

Now, there are a lot of different things I wanted to ask you about, but you get here in 1989. New Orleans is a very different place in 1989.

[1:07:12.9]

Maggie Marx: Oh, yes.

[1:07:14.7]

Justin Nystrom: Can you tell me a little bit about kind of like finding a place to live?

Did you live in that apartment that you found very long?

[1:07:29.2]

Maggie Marx: Well, I lived there for five years until—my landlord was a lawyer and he had his office downstairs, and he decided he wanted to expand his office into the upstairs, so I gave up my apartment. And then I kept moving this way, down from the French Quarter. So then I lived on the corner of Franklin—I've only lived three places in New Orleans—

[1:07:57.0]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow.

[1:07:58.6]

Maggie Marx: —in the whole time I've been here.

[1:08:00.0]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[1:08:01.1]

Maggie Marx: So it was five years by the park, and then I lived for about a year and a half in the apartment on Franklin, Burgundy, and Music, and I lived there until—I had gone to the Yucatan for two weeks, and I came home, I was really exhausted. I'd gone down to Feelings and had one of their famous martinis, which that was so funny, because it's a huge martini glass, and everybody said we made the best martinis in the whole city, and our secret was all we did was put ice and chill the vodka and pour it in the martini glass. There was no vermouth. And then you would have people who would come up to you and say—you know, it's, "Would you like another one?" because they were in the patio, so I didn't go to them; they had to come to me. "Would you like another martini?" "Oh, yes, I would, but a little less vermouth this time." [Nystrom Laughter]

And I go, "Of course. I'm so sorry."

I'm thinking, "You silly fool. There's no vermouth in there at all." [laughter]

So I'd had a couple of those martinis and I was very tired, and when I got up the next day, I, after a while, discovered that my apartment had been robbed while I was in it—

[1:09:24.2]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow.

[1:09:25.5]

Maggie Marx: —which was, like, my worst nightmare. But the good thing was I was so wiped out that I was unaware of it the whole time. He was in my bedroom. I was so freaked out that—and I blamed the landlord because he wouldn't repair the fence, the gate to the fence to the backyard. But this guy was like Spiderman. Electric lines come

from the poles into the side of a corner of the building, generally, and then down a little pipe to the breaker box. So this guy waltzed in the backyard, climbed up on the breaker box, climbed up the pipe, and came through my bathroom window.

And I think it maybe have been a kid, because he took—he was dumb. He went through my bedroom into the living room, the other one with the balcony, the whole deal, and he stole the VCR. He took my purse and the remotes. He took from my bureau a bowl of change. My 35-millimeter camera's sitting right there, all my jewelry, not that I'm—fortunately, I wear silver, not gold, but there's some nice things in there. Didn't touch any of that. It took me a while to piece this all together over time when I would discover things that he took. A can of tuna fish, a jar of mayonnaise, my can opener. He had the bowl with the change in it.

The way I [Laughter]—I won't even explain that. He had come in through the window, but apparently—well, I will explain it because now it comes into play. The way I discovered what had happened is I had to pee in the morning, and I look over by the—there's a clawfoot tub, and there's a sheet lying between the tub and the window on the floor, and I'm going, “What the—the sheet doesn't belong over there. What is that?” And I went over and I went to pick it up and it was really heavy, and I realized that one corner of it was tied around the leg of the bathtub. It was the leg that used to fall off of the bathtub, which could be real interesting if you were standing here taking a shower and, all of a sudden, the whole world is moving. And then I looked at the window and the window was propped up on the jar of bath salts that I had used the night before in my bath, and I know I didn't leave it—did not prop the window up with it. And then I totally

freaked out because I thought there could still be somebody in there, which it turned out there wasn't.

But after **more**, I would go downstairs, and the door is closed. The lock is taken off. It's a deadbolt. I mean, it's been dismantled, and the door is shut on a dishcloth. So then I went and look, and he had taken—this stupid idiot has got my keys, are in purse, to my car, which is right out front, and the door. Well, he'd tried to go down like Cinderella on the—is that—no—Rapunzel, on Rapunzel's hair with the sheet, but the leg came off the tub. [Nystrom laughter] I just wish he had been suspended by it over the second-floor drop. So he wasn't going to get out the way he came in, so he must have gone down, couldn't open the door, came up, took out a screwdriver, sprocket screwdriver set thing that I had down, and took the lock apart, but the door must not have stayed shut if you didn't have it locked, so he has to have gone back up to get the dishcloth to close it.

[Nystrom laughter] It was all stupid.

That's when I decided I—because I still had some money left from selling the restaurant. I said, "I'm going to buy a house. I'm going to be my own landlord, just like I'm going to have a restaurant. *I* am going to open a restaurant to work in, because I'm tired of the way other people do it. I'm going to buy a house and be my own landlord, because I'm tired of being at the whim of somebody else who will not fix the gates, and now my life is being threatened."

[1:14:04.6]

Justin Nystrom: And so you bought this house then?

[1:14:06.8]

Maggie Marx: And I bought this house then.

[1:14:08.2]

Justin Nystrom: What year was that?

[1:14:09.6]

Maggie Marx: That was 1996.

[1:14:11.7]

Justin Nystrom: Wow. And this was a very different area in 1996.

[1:14:14.8]

Maggie Marx: Yes, it was.

I have to pee. [Laughter]

[1:14:18.6]

Justin Nystrom: No problem.

[Recorder turned off]

[1:14:36.8]

Justin Nystrom: So when you waited at, I'm assuming, Alberto's, was that single service? Were you tipping out?

[1:14:45.2]

Maggie Marx: I think we tipped the kitchen out. And we had to—we sold wine upstairs, but if people wanted cocktails, you had to go down the stairs to the bar—

[1:15:09.7]

Justin Nystrom: To the Apple Barrel.

[1:15:11.3]

Maggie Marx: To the Apple Barrel, and if it's on a weekend, it's all anybody could do to get to the bar. So you're there, you know you've got food coming up upstairs, and the bartenders were good about trying to get to us because they knew we were under time constraints. So we had to order the drinks from downstairs and go back upstairs. One night, I was practically in tears. I was waiting on a table, it was friends of Mary Fuentes, one of the owners, the one that got punched in the face, and so I was trying to be especially, you know, careful with them.

And there was a large group of people, maybe six or eight people, and they, of course, arrived one at a time, and when they would arrive, then they would want a drink, so I'm going downstairs to get the drink. And then there's time I have to stand there. There's not enough time to go back upstairs and do anything while the drink's being made, get back up there, and then another one—now I'm going to another table that I have, but now

another person has joined this table and they're telling me what they want to drink, and now I'm like, well, do I go to the other table that I'm overdue at or do I run and get— because this is the boss' friends. And, I mean, finally, I just about lost it and I told Mary, “I just can't do this. They've got to get it together and tell me—,” you know. And I would always ask when there'd be a new person, would anybody else like another cocktail. So that's some of what happens. The people are totally oblivious that they're asking you to work miracles, and they are, rightly so. They're not supposed to be concerned with what hoops you're jumping through to do something seemingly simple.

[Laughter]

[1:17:09.6]

Justin Nystrom: So you bussed your own tables, I guess, at Alberto's?

[1:17:13.2]

Maggie Marx: Oh, yeah.

[1:17:13.8]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah.

[1:17:14.7]

Maggie Marx: Oh, yeah, we had no busboys or anything, no.

[1:17:18.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Did you tip out the people at Apple Barrel or—

[1:17:20.2]

Maggie Marx: Yeah, yeah, we did. We tip out the bar.

[1:17:22.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[1:17:25.8]

Maggie Marx: And I remember at the time—of course, well, I was only forty then—well, for me, it was like playing a game to try to see if I could do this, but what the—I don't think it was—it wasn't required of us—I used to try to take all my orders without writing down what it was, and I got pretty good at it, except if you had four people—not with a table of eight. I mean, no way. But with four people, you've got three people's orders in your head and then somebody asks you a question about something, so you shut down that one file to answer the question, and now you've kind of lost some information in the interim. [Laughter] And that's when I finally said, no, I'm not going to try to do this anymore.

[1:18:15.8]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, I tried that during my very brief stint as a waiter and it didn't work out so well. [Laughter]

[1:18:21.6]

Maggie Marx: It's not easy.

[1:18:24.4]

Justin Nystrom: No, no. So Alberto's, I'm guessing, no point-of-sale system or anything like that.

[1:18:30.5]

Maggie Marx: [Laughter] No, no, nuh-uh.

[1:18:37.0]

Justin Nystrom: Was it cash only?

[1:18:37.7]

Maggie Marx: Yes, it was cash only. Yeah, now, there were credit cards then, but not there.

[1:18:44.4]

Justin Nystrom: That was pretty common at the time in New Orleans—

[1:18:49.5]

Maggie Marx: Yes.

[1:18:49.7]

Justin Nystrom: —wasn't it, to have cash-only restaurants?

[1:18:51.3]

Maggie Marx: Well, I mean, that gives the restaurant owners a lot more leeway in how they prepare their taxes.

[1:18:58.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. They were checking the cash accounting method for taxes, yeah.

[Laughter]

[1:19:02.8]

Maggie Marx: It's good for everybody.

[1:19:03.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah.

[1:19:04.4]

Maggie Marx: Because I look back—I actually was saying this to Victor [Pizarro] the other day. We were talking about Social Security. So when you're that age, you're not thinking about Social Security, but it was not uncommon for waiters and waitresses not to declare all of their tips, and there was no record of anything, which, actually—because you're not getting paid anything reasonable. I mean—

[1:19:32.5]

Justin Nystrom: Nominal amount, yeah.

[1:19:34.2]

Maggie Marx: And still to this day, it's \$2.13 an hour you're getting paid—

[1:19:38.5]

Justin Nystrom: Right.

[1:19:38.8]

Maggie Marx: —and then you have people that decide that, for whatever reason, they didn't like the cut of your jib or something and they're not going to tip you, but you have to tip out. And in a larger restaurant—this was a very tiny restaurant, but when I worked at the [Marigny] Brasserie, I'm tipping out the bartenders, the busboy, the expeditor in the kitchen, and sometimes the cooks, and now somebody stiffes you on a table and you're still expected by the numbers of your sales to pay out all this money to people.

[1:20:21.5]

Justin Nystrom: So the tip-out's not computed on the actual net tips; it's computed on the sales?

[1:20:28.2]

Maggie Marx: Yes.

[1:20:33.5]

Justin Nystrom: Wow.

[1:20:34.8]

Maggie Marx: No. Wait, I can't remember. No, it's a percentage of your tips.

[1:20:39.8]

Justin Nystrom: Okay, because I've heard where—now, taxes can sometimes—

[1:20:44.9]

Maggie Marx: Can be based on the total sales. You can be taxed—but if you're working in a nice restaurant, you're in a different level. You're easily, even on a terrible night, you're meeting the requirements. The federal requirements, to bring you up to minimum wage, you have to declare—I haven't been working for several years, but it used to be that you had to declare enough—like when I had my restaurant, I would tell them just, “I'm paying you the—,” whatever it was, \$2.35, or, no, I was paying them more than—when I came here from Key West, I was paying my cooks in Key West more than the guys working at Feelings Café were making here—

[1:21:40.1]

Justin Nystrom: Wow, wow.

[1:21:42.3]

Maggie Marx: —in a fancy restaurant.

[1:21:44.3]

Justin Nystrom: At a houseboat in Key West.

[1:21:47.5]

Maggie Marx: Right. But that's also because that's me. I want to hire somebody and have them—like, we still had people from the day we began who were still working for us at the end, because—it's my same thing—unfortunately, we're not born independently wealthy. We have to work for a living. Let's make it as pleasant as possible, and that's what I tried to do, and they respected that and were not robbing me, I mean, because my boyfriend, he'd never worked in a restaurant. And when you talk about bartenders, how do you know—there's no way you can keep a bartender from stealing from you except who you hire to be that bartender. You have to trust that person, and that's why I always, like, give people free drinks at the end of the night, because if you don't give them free drinks, they're going to take them anyway, so at least, you know, don't steal from me. Let me feel good about giving you something.

[1:22:55.0]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, I mean, you would see, I guess, over time, people helping themselves in restaurants. You've probably seen that a number of times.

[1:23:07.0]

Maggie Marx: Oh, yeah.

[1:23:07.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I'm not going to ask you to comment on specific examples [laughter], but so you're working in a cash house at Alberto's. How about Feelings? Now, Feelings, you're—

[1:23:21.1]

Maggie Marx: Well, by then, and it being a city, people were using credit cards, but it was, I don't know, maybe fifty-fifty credit cards and cash.

[1:23:33.1]

Justin Nystrom: And where was technology? Because I know point-of-sale had a big impact on people waiting tables.

[1:23:40.9]

Maggie Marx: Oh, yeah.

[1:23:42.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, was that your first connection with that or—

[1:23:42.2]

Maggie Marx: We sort of had a—we didn't really—we had the computer thing at Feelings, towards the end of my time at Feelings, but you had to handwrite up the check and it was cashiered by the bartender. It wasn't based on the computer printout. That was the other thing, the stairs again. Feelings has an upstairs. Used to have another whole second dining room up there, plus private dining rooms. Again, the bar is downstairs and the kitchen was downstairs, so when you would take an order at the table, you had to go down the stairs to the kitchen, put in the order, come back up, either before or at the same time, take a drink order, go downstairs, stand there and wait for the drinks, and come run back upstairs. So it was a whole lot of running up and down the stairs, and those stairs were scary old New Orleans—well, it's a slave ... it was a storehouse, so there was a store downstairs and living quarters upstairs, and there's a slave quarter there, which the bar is located in, and that second dining room was above the bar. And then there was a balcony that overlooks the patio. So there's a lot of going up and down. When you come up the stairs, then you go through and you step down onto the balcony and then into the dining room.

[1:25:27.3]

Justin Nystrom: Did you ever have a time in your career where you just couldn't work because you couldn't do the stairs, like you ever hurt yourself or—

[1:25:33.1]

Maggie Marx: Well, actually, I ruptured a disc in my back—

[1:25:34.3]

Justin Nystrom: Wow.

[1:25:35.7]

Maggie Marx: —during that time when I was working there, and they were very good to me. And I spent two months in my living room in that apartment by the park, and I was on the second floor. I could barely—I could not stand up straight. I had to teach myself how to walk again. I worked with a chiropractor down the block, and I remember it was the most depressing thing that ever happened to me, because the pain is excruciating. And one night, I just wanted some ice cream so bad. I used to call—Matassa’s used to deliver food to me—

[1:26:19.2]

Justin Nystrom: Sure.

[1:26:20.1]

Maggie Marx: —but I don’t know why—why didn’t I just do that? Well, I guess I didn’t think I could order just a container of ice cream. So, I mean, I knew what flavor I wanted, and I finally said, “I’m going to do this.” And so I laid down in what I call the “dead roach” position with my knees bent up, which would stop the spasms, and I went down the stairs right foot, right foot, right foot, and got into my car, which I drive a standard-shift. So anyway, I’m down there, my back is hurting, so I put my legs up on the

dashboard until that subsides. I drive to Walgreens on St. Claude, park the car, sit in the parking lot with my legs up on the dashboard [Laughter], go into this drugstore, which has already got a lot of strange people in there, and get over by the ice cream container, the freezer thing, and there's a case of something that's unopened sitting there, so I just sat down, because I really needed to sit down, and the manager comes by and looks at me and says, "Are you okay?" [Nystrom laughter]

And I said, "No, but I will be," unlike some of these people. [Laughter]

So then it sort of subsided and I got up and I got the ice cream and I kind of hobbled up to the front and there's this huge line, and I'm standing there going, "I cannot stand here and wait. I have to sit down. Okay. What do I do? I have to get to my car. I cannot walk back to the ice cream freezer and put this up and then walk back and then go out to the—." So I just—I've never done that before in my life—just put the thing down on whatever, the counter, whatever was close to me, and went out, got into the car, put my legs up on the dashboard, waited for the spasms to stop, drove home, did the same thing, right foot, right foot, right foot, back up the stairs, went inside, and just bawled my head off. I was in such pain and so frustrated.

And I went to—because I'd only gone to the chiropractor. At work, at Feelings, we had a doctor who was a regular customer. Every Saturday night, he and his wife were there, and so they—that's the thing, if you hurt your back, there's nothing visibly wrong with you, so you don't know if the person is, like, making this all up. And I said, "Sure, I'd love to go see—," Fritsch was his name.

Jim, one of my bosses, drove me over to him, and I remember lying on the table and he goes, "Okay, raise your left leg." And, you know, so, I don't know, when somebody says

that, you just raise—you don't really—your leg goes up. My leg didn't go up. And then he's checking me out. He says, "You ruptured a disc in your back," and so not to pick anything up and all of this.

And I invented exercises for myself, and then I would go out and I would walk. I would try to go over to the—there was a news—back in the day when we had newspaper machines everywhere from *The Times-Picayune*, I would go over—well, my aim was to get to the newspaper machine that was by the hardware store on Elysian Fields, and I remember the first time I went right foot, right foot, right foot down the stairs, walked across to the neutral ground and, without thinking, went to step up with my left leg, and I fell down in the neutral ground. And I was just devastated, so I was like, "Okay, just go back, and I get back."

And then the next day, I went back and I made it to the newspaper stand and back, and I did that for a few days. Then I would walk a block and a half and back a block and a half and got so I could walk around the block. And I just taught myself to walk again and to build up strength. I had the same bed I have here—it's got, like, four posts—I would put a phonebook down and hold onto the bed so I wouldn't fall down and step up with my left foot on the phonebook and bring my other leg up and step down with the left leg, and keep doing that, because my leg was withering.

[1:30:54.3]

Justin Nystrom: Did you feel like you were ever going to be able to get back to work?

[1:30:57.8]

Maggie Marx: No, I wasn't sure what was going to happen. I've never been so incapacitated in my life. I've never had so much pain in my life, which here comes the funny part. Well, it's not funny at all, actually, but many years later, the doctor came in to—I think he was at Feelings. He was at my housewarming party; could have been here. He said, "Maggie," he said, "I'm really sorry for not being more sympathetic when you came to me with your back." He said, "I've never had anything like that happen until recently." He ruptured a disc in his back. He said he'd never been in such pain in his life. And nobody gave me any—I didn't take anything for it. I wouldn't have. I don't like to take that stuff anyway, but—

[1:31:43.3]

Justin Nystrom: It's bad. I've actually had that. It's bad.

[1:31:44.8]

Maggie Marx: It's *bad*. You can't bend over to brush your teeth because that part of the back isn't working, and there are just these things you cannot do.

[1:31:59.2]

Justin Nystrom: So health insurance, did you ever work at a place with health insurance?

[1:32:05.3]

Maggie Marx: [Laughter] No, never.

[1:32:07.0]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah. And so up until recently with, I guess—I've heard people say Obamacare is the first health insurance they've gotten.

[1:32:16.7]

Maggie Marx: I guess. I was retired by Obama—I mean not by Obama—by the time of Obama—

[1:32:23.6]

Justin Nystrom: Sure.

[1:32:24.7]

Maggie Marx: —so I never was given health insurance anywhere.

[1:32:28.8]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Did you ever carry anything like a major medical or anything like that?

[1:32:33.7]

Maggie Marx: I did, but I was always healthy and nothing ever happened, and so then I stopped doing it. So mostly I was uninsured most of my life.

[1:32:40.8]

Justin Nystrom: Wow. How about people you worked with?

[1:32:43.0]

Maggie Marx: Same thing.

[1:32:44.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Dare we talk about Marigny Brasserie?

[1:32:50.9]

Maggie Marx: Sure.

[1:32:52.1]

Justin Nystrom: [Laughter] Tell me about your time at Marigny Brasserie.

[1:32:55.5]

Maggie Marx: [Laughter] Well, we have to take about the specific parts. It was right after Katrina and everything was very crazy. I had left Feelings—and that's another whole story. I left Feelings and—

[1:33:15.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, but if you want, we could back up and talk about leaving Feelings and Katrina.

[1:33:19.6]

Maggie Marx: Well, I mean, I was approached by a friend about buying Mona Lisa in the French Quarter.

[1:33:27.4]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, I love Mona Lisa.

[1:33:28.6]

Maggie Marx: Uh-huh, well, yeah, I loved it too. [laughter] And this person had the cash to put down, but, again, had no experience. Well, he once worked in a restaurant in the French Quarter. He's a gay guy, was, like, a gay hamburger restaurant, is the best sense I can make out of it. [Nystrom Laughter] I don't know why all the emphasis was on that, but it was. It was presented to me that way. Anyhow—

[1:34:03.1]

Justin Nystrom: He wanted to turn Mona Lisa into that or how did—

[1:34:05.5]

Maggie Marx: No. He wanted to buy Mona Lisa and he knew he needed help, and I had the experience of buying a restaurant before and, well, in this case, it's not building it. You're buying an existing business. So I said, "We have to learn how to do everything that they're doing so that if somebody isn't there—" You have to know how to do what

it is you're asking other people to do, at least to my way of thinking. So I was working there at night. Finally, I quit Feelings Café so that I could work at Mona Lisa at night—

[1:34:48.3]

Justin Nystrom: Okay.

[1:34:48.3]

Maggie Marx: —so that I could learn—because I worked with Suleyman [Aydin], and see what he did and, you know, how to—so that's what I was doing. And my prospective business partner felt that he had a—he was friends with Suleyman's sister [Fatma Aydin], who actually owned the restaurant legally at that point in time. He had opened it originally. Well, I think what actually happened [Laughter], when it all came out at the end, I think he never was paying withholding taxes when he had the restaurant, and so, you know, the IRS closed him down. And then his sister, he sold the restaurant to his sister, so she legally owned it. I believe that's how it went down.

And so this is going on, and the other partner, he's coming in in the daytime, because he's a day person, and he's supposed to be learning how to do the cooking in there. And so this is going on for a number of months, and they're showing me these books. And like I said, I never took courses in all that, but I'm reading this stuff going, "This doesn't make any sense at all. This is not possible." And then there's this safe in the floor, and you just—there's no printout at the end of the night from the cash register, so there's no total sales, and it seems that there's only like three people who are paying taxes, and they're all direct family. The other people aren't—there's a guy working in there who's

not on the books, who has a degenerative bone disease in his neck. If he fell down, he could be paralyzed for life. He's got no workman's comp, he's got nothing.

And during the course of this time, Fatma [Aydin], who owns the restaurant, somebody came in and—I don't remember who it—oh, a company that does—what did I just say—your insurance—

[1:37:14.6]

Justin Nystrom: The workman's comp.

[1:37:16.5]

Maggie Marx: Workman's comp. And Fatma says, "Oh, no. That's too expensive. Don't pay workman's comp."

And I'm going, "It's *the law*. You are required to pay workman's comp."

And that's when I thought about this guy working for her, and I wanted to say, "I thought—" I can't say anything to her, because she knows how to do it, and, in a way, she did.

Then, after months of this, the lawyer that my partner had hired, who I was not very happy about, all of a sudden, he comes up with this very interesting tidbit that that business owes the IRS—there's a lien on the business for \$90,000, and if we bought the restaurant, we would also get the bonus of a 90,000-dollar debt to the IRS.

[1:38:19.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, that's how it works, yeah.

[1:38:21.2]

Maggie Marx: And I'm going, "But I know this—see, I know this story." That's because I was trying to save Jan's [phonetic] house in Key West. And I said, "Well, okay." I said, "Don't get hysterical," I said, "because they don't have to pay all that money. They have to play "Let's make a deal" with the IRS and talk with them."

And I was saying that to her, and she's going, "Well, I'm doing it, I'm doing it."

Well, at some point, my prospective partner and I go to IRS to talk to them. "Well, we can't tell you anything because we're not allowed to say—."

And I said, "Well, I just want to know that—I'm not asking personal information about finances or anything. I just want to know that they're working with you to make this a more manageable amount."

And she says, "Well, between us, I've not heard back from her at all."

And I went, "Oh, shit. She's not doing—she's lying about everything."

We had a liquor license. We went down to city hall. We didn't know what we were doing. Oh, that's an exciting adventure. This is before Katrina. There was no kiosk fast paced... [laughter] We know it doesn't work anyway, but—

[1:39:37.4]

Justin Nystrom: Right.

[1:39:38.7]

Maggie Marx: —oh, my God. We went through all of that. And then she—oh, she didn't want us to talk to the landlord at first, and then we said, "Well, we need to move this along," because we're coming up now on French Quarter Fest and Gay Pride and all of this stuff.

So finally she says, oh, she's talking to them. So, okay, said, "We have their name and their name and everything," and call them up. Well, I was talking to her. They had no idea, anything about this.

And the long and the short of it is we ended up, we had the lease. They agreed to do a lease with us. We had the liquor license. We brought the place up to code. I scrubbed their kitchen.

[1:40:35.3]

Justin Nystrom: That must have been some effort, yes.

[1:40:38.8]

Maggie Marx: Oh, yeah, that was *some* effort [Laughter], and got it passed again by the health department. And the health department wasn't happy about a lot of strange things, but it's the French Quarter. Yeah, there's—

[1:40:55.3]

Justin Nystrom: The restroom in there is funky and, yeah—

[1:40:57.6]

Maggie Marx: Yeah, there's one for two restaurants.

[1:40:58.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[1:41:00.9]

Maggie Marx: And there were refrigerators out in the patio. [Laughter]

[1:41:02.8]

Justin Nystrom: Right.

[1:41:04.9]

Maggie Marx: And I'm like, "But that's the way it is. There's no—." And it's been like—it's, like, grandfathered in—

[1:41:10.6]

Justin Nystrom: Right.

[1:41:11.3]

Maggie Marx: —was my point. But there were a lot of little fudgy areas in there. And then the partner, well, actually, I caught her in a totally blatant lie about something totally unnecessary, and the conversation didn't even have to have existed, let alone these stupid things that she's telling me. And my partner backs out and, of course, didn't tell me that.

I discovered it when I went to do something with the bank account and it was missing \$60,000, and I just about had a heart attack. It's like, "Yeah, it's your money, but you don't just take it out of there without telling me." And then I thought, you know, I'm better off not to have been in this at all. But meanwhile, now I've lost \$7,000, six months of my life, and my job of fourteen years, and I just about lost my mind. I mean, I really, like, went a little cuckoo, because I thought I could roll [Laughter] with this, but—and I was beating myself up for, like, how it never occurred to me that I was dealing with a pathological liar. So—

[1:42:34.6]

Justin Nystrom: I mean, the nature of the restaurant business is different than a lot of businesses.

[1:42:38.6]

Maggie Marx: Right. Oh, absolutely.

[1:42:40.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[1:42:41.3]

Maggie Marx: So, but fess up and now—I mean, they told me some of the things straight out that they were doing, but—

[1:42:46.4]

Justin Nystrom: Do you think the restaurant business—waiting tables attracts a certain type of person as a career. I mean, would you think that running a restaurant also attracts a certain type of person? Can you make a characterization or are they just all different?

[1:43:03.3]

Maggie Marx: Well, I think this particular—I think they're different. I don't think people realize—to me, it's highly unlikely that you are going to be successful running a restaurant unless you've worked in one, unless you have firsthand experience. Now, if you have a whole lot of money and you can hire people with that experience, then you could pull it off, but now you're totally dependent upon those people, and, to me, I don't want to be dependent on any—that's like I would—anything I'm asking you to do in my restaurant is something I can do myself. And also if you walk out the door, I can do your job, where, okay, some people think, “Well, I'm doing this,” and they can't do it. If I leave, they won't be able to function. Well, I don't want to be that person.

So it depends on your perspective of what—now, I think the person I was prospectively going into business with thought that he wasn't going to have to do any heavy lifting, because I think his previous experience in the restaurant business was this hamburger place which was owned by a wealthy gay man who basically sat at home and collected money, and I think that's what he thought he was going to do. And he had a car, but his partner was using the car, and I said, “You're going to need a car if you're here in the daytime.”

And he goes, “What would I need a car for?”

I said, “For when you run out of stuff that somebody didn’t order or whatever, or, you know, you need an extension cord all of a sudden or you need to be able to get places.”

This is before Uber and all of that stuff.

And then he came to me and, “I talked to Fatma. She said they’ve never run out of anything.”

And I’m looking at him, I’m thinking, “And you believed her that they never ran out of anything? Well, then you’re deluding yourself, because that’s not reality.”

[1:45:12.5]

Justin Nystrom: What’s the strangest thing you’ve ever had to run out and buy?

[1:45:16.7]

Maggie Marx: Oh, I don’t think—it’s not strange. I mean, I can’t think of what it would be, but all of a sudden for some crazy reason, you don’t have any milk and you need it for something.

[1:45:29.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[1:45:30.3]

Maggie Marx: Or it’s something like that. Or you’ve run out of register tape or something like that.

[1:45:37.5]

Justin Nystrom: And the show goes on. It's not like you can stop, say, "We're closed. Gone fishin'."

[1:45:44.7]

Maggie Marx: No, no! If your credit card machine—if the power goes off, you still have to be able to run credit cards, because nobody carries money now, so that part has to be functioning. And also now you can't communicate with the kitchen because you're all doing everything by computer.

[1:45:44.7]

Justin Nystrom: Right. Well, now you're going back to the age of the paper ticket.

[1:46:05.2]

Maggie Marx: Right. Well, I mean, that happened at Brasserie where the power would go out, and so I guess we had emergency lights that came on. I'm thinking that must have been the reason that we couldn't—or the computers were down, and we didn't even have the stuff to write on. [Nystrom Laughter] It's not like, "Okay, start writing them out." On what?

[1:46:28.3]

Justin Nystrom: Because you need tickets.

[1:46:30.0]

Maggie Marx: You need tickets.

[1:46:30.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[1:46:31.5]

Maggie Marx: So that's when you have to run out and buy the tickets someplace.

[Laughter]

[1:46:35.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[1:46:37.6]

Maggie Marx: That's the kind of stuff, although now you could take an Uber or take a cab, but in business, you don't want to be taking a cab to go get a quart of milk.

[1:46:48.2]

Justin Nystrom: That ten minutes you might wait—

[1:46:50.4]

Maggie Marx: Right.

[1:46:51.9]

Justin Nystrom: —on both ends.

[1:46:53.3]

Maggie Marx: Right.

[1:46:54.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah. So Katrina comes and you'd just, I guess, just been through this Mona Lisa experience when Katrina found you?

[1:47:02.1]

Maggie Marx: And I'd gone to work three months before Katrina at Marisol—

[1:47:08.1]

Justin Nystrom: Okay, yeah.

[1:47:09.9]

Maggie Marx: —at the foot of Frenchmen Street.

[1:47:11.5]

Justin Nystrom: Sure.

[1:47:12.8]

Maggie Marx: And, in fact, I'm still friends with Jan [Janis Vasquez], who was one of the owners, she and her husband. I remember when she hired me, she said something about, "You're a woman of a certain age." [Laughter]

And I think, like, she liked me and wanted to help me, but she didn't know for sure if I could do the work, and I'm like, "I mean, I've *been* doing the work."

Anyway, so, yeah, I went to work there, and then we had Katrina, and then come back and they had a lot of damage down there, and the restaurant never reopened. So I'm here in my house, and I had some wind damage, but nothing major.

[1:48:04.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, we're pretty close to the river here, so this is high, and—

[1:48:08.7]

Maggie Marx: Right, we had no flooding here—

[1:48:10.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[1:48:11.1]

Maggie Marx: —just wind damage, and no looting or anything. There was nothing, nothing happened. I came back and, well, we didn't have any gas. I mean, in the beginning, it was awful—

[1:48:20.7]

Justin Nystrom: Right.

[1:48:21.5]

Maggie Marx: —though that’s another whole thing. I heard that Brasserie was opening, so I went down there and I applied for a job, and I’m going to—before we get into that.

[Laughter]

[recorder turned off]

[1:48:40.3]

Justin Nystrom: Okay. We’re back again, and talk about after Katrina, right after Katrina in those kind of crazy months when nobody has electricity or spotty electricity, no mail, people are parking on the sidewalk in the French Quarter still, and I was also here at that time, and Marigny Brasserie opens up in the—in Marigny.

[1:49:05.8]

Maggie Marx: I’m learning that myself, because I always say “the” and you’re not supposed to do that.

[1:49:12.2]

Justin Nystrom: Ah.

[1:49:15.5]

Maggie Marx: Okay.

[1:49:16.6]

Justin Nystrom: And so this is a fine-dining restaurant.

[1:49:18.5]

Maggie Marx: Yeah, or what here we call relaxed fine dining.

[1:49:23.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[1:49:23.8]

Maggie Marx: It's tablecloths and all of that, and—

[1:49:27.2]

Justin Nystrom: Kind of bistro.

[1:49:27.2]

Maggie Marx: Yes. Dishwashers, you have to have dishwashers in a restaurant, and it always seems like the lowliest job, but you simply cannot run a restaurant without dishwashers. Busboys, we had no busboys. It was just the waiters and the kitchen staff and the bartenders, and then they were trying to hire—there was—I can't remember what

it's called—I think it's out on Tchoupitoulas—a place where men can go who want short-term jobs, and so they were doing a booming business. And, now, there are all these people, the working force of New Orleans, in large part, were not wealthy people, especially dishwasher-type people and bus—well, busboys are usually people's kids, but those people were not here anymore, because 80 percent of the city was underwater, so I think it was both rich and poor people. Everybody equally lost their homes, but you didn't have the workforce.

And same thing when you—so I have rental apartments. Well, I needed to buy lots of—I needed to buy two refrigerators, anyway, and when you could find a store that was open and you would go there and see refrigerators for sale, that's all well and good. You forget, you don't understand the reality of what happens when something this enormous takes place. There's nobody there to sell you a refrigerator.

[1:51:18.8]

Justin Nystrom: Or deliver it.

[1:51:20.7]

Maggie Marx: Or deliver the refrigerator. They would gladly have rented me a truck for \$150 and \$100 an hour, everything over two hours. I'm like, "I don't want to buy a truck," because I remember going to a neighborhood association meeting. That was very helpful, because we all knew where to go, and I remember standing up and saying, you know, "Is there anybody here with a truck that can help me get two refrigerators to my house? Because I can't afford to buy a truck."

And there was, and that's one of the beautiful things about living in a neighborhood. Our neighborhoods are totally in jeopardy now because of short-term rentals. There's nobody that's going to drive you to buy a refrigerator, because you don't have any neighbors. People you've never seen before are here every weekend, and that's it. That's another story for another time.

Okay, the thing about the dishwashers [Laughter], there was this never-ending turnover of these very strange, scary people, men who had just gotten out of Angola who, forget a dark alley, I didn't want to meet them in the kitchen. [Nystrom Laughter] There was one guy with all these really weird tattoos, and there was this—a wonderful generationally long black woman who worked as our pastry chef. I can't think of her name right now, but she was excellent, lovely lady, and she kept looking at this guy and her eyes would get real big and roll up, and she's going, "What is that thing on his neck?"

And finally I went up to him and I asked him, "What is that tattoo on the back of your neck?"

He said, "It's a pus-oozing cut." But it's a tattoo of a wound oozing pus. [Nystrom Laughter] And I'm trying to serve food here. It was very scary.

The chef lived in Lakeview. He and his wife were rescued off their roof in a helicopter, because they were by the 17th Street Canal. They had like four cats. They had to leave the cats there. I think they got one or two of them back. He worked for another long time in another long-term German restaurant here and had apparently been told by the owner that when the owner retired, he was going to give the restaurant over to the chef, so he thinks he's got his life set, you know, or at least it's planned out. He's got a nice car, nice house in Lakeview. No house, no car, no job, because the restaurant was closed that he'd been

working at. Well, then it turns out that this chef, when he left, the other chef, I mean the owner chef that he had worked for, during evacuation, ended up in the company of some nurses, and they asked him was he having a—well, he said he had a nasal infection or something, and they said, “And you need to go see a doctor.” Turned out he had cancer of the brain—

[1:55:05.2]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, my goodness.

[1:55:06.8]

Maggie Marx: —and he had to have brain surgery, so he was not going to open the restaurant when he came back. So now this guy, now he’s lost his house, his car, maybe his cats, his pets, and his job. He comes to work at the Brasserie. He’s working constantly. And somewhere, I don’t know, several months down the road of knowing him, I’ve met his wife, a very delicate little thing. She used to be a dancer or whatever. Anyway, he cooks, he does brunch one Sunday—he’s doing brunches too. He would fall asleep in the back. He goes home after brunch and he goes to wake his wife up on the couch and she’s dead.

[1:56:05.3]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, my god.

[1:56:07.0]

Maggie Marx: And she died of natural causes, but “oh, my god” indeed, it’s more than anybody should have to deal with.

And then I also remember we had dishwashers, some of them who were living in, like, Gentilly, and there’s no electricity from St. Claude back, and he was afraid to go home—not home. Well, he was squatting in an empty house, but there were some other guys along the way who knew his route, and they would jump—because you had to pay everybody in cash, the dishwashers—they would jump him every night and steal his money, so he was afraid to go home. Everybody had these things happening to them, and you’re surrounded. And I’m a very empathetic person, and I remember during those times, I cried every day. Just things would set me off. I couldn’t believe that people had to go through this.

And it’s so twisted, my mind, that because of where I live, where my house is situated—and we are on this little bit, the Sliver by the River. I have a home, I have everything. When I left, I said—when I had left to evacuate the day before the storm, I said goodbye to my house and to all my possessions, not that they’re worth a whole lot of money, but it’s my whole life. Everything in my house has got a story behind it. And I’m thinking, you know, if you put the blinders on, you can go to work. You can get dressed, go to work like a normal person and go to work at the Brasserie like a normal person and not see—. Well, but you did see, because you come back at night and everything’s black over there, and we had curfews, and you had to worry about if you were going to be stopped in a curfew. There are armed men with machine guns lurking on dark streets and you don’t know who they are, which side they’re on. There are Humvees and military vehicles driving around. Everything stinks. There’s bugs and flies and stuff around the

refrigerators that, hypothetically, you're supposed to take the doors off and leave them open. Well, nobody in their right mind would do that. They're all, like, taped shut or welded shut. I cleaned mine. Still didn't work. I went through this—I got a trial by fire of taking all the living creatures out of my refrigerator, not to mention the smell of the—unbelievable smell.

Okay, very fortunately, there were a lot of people that were sympathetic to New Orleans and wanted to come here and to spend money here, and, yes, thank you, you know. We were very enthusiastic about that ourselves, but you get really strange things and strange people. I waited on some, like, business-looking guys, and I'm bringing them—I don't know if it happened to have anything to do with the check at that point. Anyway, towards the end of the meal, the guy looks at me and goes [demonstrates]. I said, "I'm here to sell food. That's all I'm selling." I was *so* furious, I could—what is it about wait people, people—that's another thing. My whole life, it's like people look down on you for being a lowly waitress. [Imitates] "She's a waitress." I know more things about more different things [Laughter] than lots of people do. I have a college education. I've been out of this country. I've been around. I'm not stupid. I can talk about lots of different things, and I'm a pretty good judge of character. And, I mean, I made some really good money from time—you can't depend upon it, but I always felt that I was looked down upon, and then here you have men who think that you're for sale because you're waiting tables. How dare you? How dare you diminish me because of the work that I do? It just infuriated me.

[2:01:09.3]

Justin Nystrom: Did that happen much or—

[2:01:11.8]

Maggie Marx: Not much. Well, I had some other weird things. I had a guy who was diddling his dining partner in the booth, then wanted me to come sit on his lap. Actually, it was when I was still working with Victor then, and I told—Victor was going to go over. I don't know what he was going to do to this man, but I had to call Victor off. I said, "Please, you're going to kill this guy and it's not going to work out well for anybody." I said, "I can handle it." But you shouldn't have to handle it.

[2:01:40.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[2:01:42.2]

Maggie Marx: I mean, when I was a lot younger, when I started out in Vermont, I was waiting tables and cocktail waiting tables, and people, you know, feel free to—or they did at that point in time—to just reach out and grab your ass. When I worked on the Vineyard, Martha's Vineyard, I worked in a cocktail lounge, Ocean View Cocktail Lounge, and that's all we served, was drinks. And it's this huge room. And I worked for a brother and sister, and they'd been in the bar business their whole lives, I'm thinking. She was, like, this buxom blonde, and she used to work in this well-known bar, which I can't even remember—I can never remember the name of it—in Oak Bluffs, but it was a little rough-and-tumble. So she's walking around with a tray with beer bottles and this guy grabs her ass, and she yells at him and says, you know, "You have no right to do that!

Don't touch me! Leave me alone!" And then he did it again. She admonished a second time. And then he did it a third time. She picked up the beer bottle and busted it over his head.

This woman said to me—she's now my employer—she said, "We back up our staff. If you tell me that somebody is shut off, I don't care if it's my father, my uncle, my brother, you're right. I will back you up on any decisions that you make."

And I'm going, "This is a woman that busts bottles over men's heads, so I'm pretty sure I'm never going to do anything that's going to upset her." [Laughter] But this stuff goes on.

[2:03:36.5]

Justin Nystrom: Different working for women than for men?

[2:03:39.4]

Maggie Marx: I haven't worked for that many women. I worked for the Australian woman. I worked for this woman and her brother. I worked for another woman who didn't like me because she thought her husband was coming on to me. That was my first—that was when I waited on the Alcohol and Beverage people in that place, Munro's Boston House. And he drank too much, and one night, we had just cleaned up everything. I had to be back the next morning, and he comes in, "Come here. I want to talk to you." So I go in, and it's dark in there. And I go in and I sit down. He's drunk, he's unhappy. He wants to talk about his life. So, okay, I sit there and listen to him talk about his life,

and it's like, I didn't have to be anywhere. It was okay, and because also people tell me things. I don't know why.

And then the next thing you know, his wife is being really strange to me. And so legally my name is Margaret, but I've never been called that, so whenever she would bring me my paycheck, she would stand behind me and say, "Margaret!" And it got to be a joke with the other people, you know, when they wanted to, like, poke at me for something, "Margaret!"

So one night, we were all done, everybody else had gone home. I was the last one coming out of the dining room, and this tour bus arrives. It's like 11:00 o'clock at night, which for there is late. And she says, "I want you to wait on them in the dining room, so strip the tables in this one section and serve them drinks in there."

I'm going, I'm making \$2.13 an hour, and I'm tired. I've been working since 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon, and I have to be there the next morning. And so I go, "Okay," and I strip the tables. I serve all these people their cocktails. It's 12:30, it's 1:00 in the morning. I reset the tables.

Somehow, I signed out three times that night. I think I had signed out before she told me I had to wait on the bus, so I signed back in. Then I signed out after I'd reset the tables and the people had left, and she said, "Oh—." She wanted me to scrape down the ice cream containers in the freezer in the kitchen. So I went and scraped them down and signed out.

And, mind you, they had me teaching new hires how to set the tables and everything.

Then she points at the table. She doesn't like the angle of this fork, so she wants me to strip the whole table and reset it, and I'm supposed to be there in the morning.

And I finally told her where she could put the silverware, and I just said, “I can’t work for this woman, because she’s just out to get me, and it doesn’t matter. And she has pushed me as far as I’m willing to play her stupid juvenile game with me.” And it was a good job, but I had to give up the job because she thought I had something going on with her husband, which was not true at all. I was trying to keep my job, but I wasn’t doing anything with him. The man never touched me. I never would have let him touch me.

[2:07:37.5]

Justin Nystrom: So coming back to New Orleans, so Marigny Brasserie, you worked there for how long?

[2:07:44.7]

Maggie Marx: Five years.

[2:07:47.1]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow. So it was a pretty long-term gig.

[2:07:49.1]

Maggie Marx: Right.

[2:07:50.7]

Justin Nystrom: Wow. And so this is that transition time where that five years after Katrina, everything’s a little different every year, right?

[2:08:01.9]

Maggie Marx: Oh, yeah, it was getting sort of back to normal-ish.

[2:08:05.8]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, normal-ish. And then this is where you met Victor, who we've also interviewed.

[2:08:10.6]

Maggie Marx: Right.

[2:08:11.0]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[2:08:11.9]

Maggie Marx: Yeah, I had worked with Victor. Well, see, the other thing that happened then was that the man who owned the business is a gay man who I think has a substance abuse problem. Let's put it that way. And he's, like, passing judgment on everybody all the time, and we had to clean toilets in there. I've never cleaned toilets in a restaurant in my life. I don't think the people that are serving you your food should be cleaning toilets. I really resented that. I worked for a manager there I really liked. He changed the restaurant around from the way that the owner had been running it. He considered his

main job to keep the owner out of the restaurant, because everything was fine when he wasn't there. Then he would come in and just start stirring shit.

You would come in in the morning—there's a cooler, a salad station, behind the line in the kitchen, and there's these little containers of everything to make the salads, all the component parts for all these different dishes, and every night, that's all taken out and cleaned and everything is carefully covered and it's refrigerated and closed down. You'd come in in the morning and it was like the rats had a party or something. I mean, everything is torn apart, everything's cross-contaminated. Well, it wasn't rats. Well, it was, in a way. It was the owner and his friends who were inebriated, shall we say, in the wee hours of the morning just [demonstrates], just, "Let's dump the—" [demonstrates] I had a lady friend that had worked at Feelings who was a cook, and she had left there for whatever reason I don't recall. Anyway, I remember I helped her, I introduced her to them. She tells me that she's coming to work in the morning and there is the owner of the restaurant passed out outside of the front doors on the sidewalk lying there. It's hard to have a lot of respect for somebody who behaves that way.

[2:10:49.0]

Justin Nystrom: And you've seen bad owners. You've known of other bad owners.

[2:10:53.3]

Maggie Marx: Right. Oh, yes, yes.

[2:10:56.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[2:10:58.2]

Maggie Marx: He also then would get this wild hair it seemed like—I counted it out once and did the math—every six months, he would fire the chef, and we would have a whole new chef and everything would change. You didn't know what the food looked like. You didn't know what the food was. You couldn't answer questions about it. The whole place would be in a shambles for three weeks, four weeks until, you know, you sort of established a rhythm.

It's very good for the front of the house and the back of the house to communicate with one another. Sometimes you have chefs who think that that's not a good idea. I worked for a chef there who, in my opinion, felt that—well, actually, I'd heard him say it out loud, you know—I didn't hear it—it was quoted to me by a dear friend who said she had come from the kitchen and one of the cooks was asking him, said, “Oh, why don't the waiters just order this thing?” whatever, a substance, a whatever it was.

And the chef said, “Waiters don't order anything. They're stupid.”

And she's a waitress, and so she hears this and comes out and says, “Oh, well, great.”

So now I have a little bit of an attitude going about him myself. And he would do everything he could to separate the front of the house from the back of the house like you were less than, and, actually, we're way higher educated than the people in the back of the house, for the most part. And then he would set it up so that they hired—we had food runners and you had expeditors, so basically you couldn't talk to the people in the kitchen, but if there's a problem, the expeditor doesn't want to have to deal with that, and

now you're between a rock and a hard place, so do you interrupt the chef or the cook to ask—I mean, I've had people do things to me just because it wasn't even—I don't think it was even a personal thing. I was bringing food to somebody, and the dish came with kale and they didn't like kale, and I'm not actually that wild about kale myself, so I could understand. I don't like bitter taste. And I said, "Well, we have spinach. Would you like spinach?"

And they, "Oh, yes."

So I put the order in. I was quite specific, "No kale, sub spinach." And then something happened where I was called away at the time of delivering the bill to the people. So then the bill was paid. I look at—they're gone, the plates are still on the table, I have no tip, and there's all this kale on the plate. And when I had been in the kitchen when I had subbed spinach, the chef had said, "What do you mean, they don't like kale? Everybody likes kale."

I said, "I don't like kale."

That's why we didn't get along [Laughter], because I—and then it was actually the sous chef that was—I have "kale" on there, and, actually, he's the one that I blamed for it. I don't know that the chef really had—although—but he's following the chef's lead. And I was so pissed off that I'm going into the kitchen, and he comes out of the kitchen, and I said, "Come here."

And I walk in the men's room [Laughter] and I bring him in the men's room, and I say, "Don't you fuck with the way I make my living. That's how I pay my rent, is from tips. I got stiffed from this table because you're fucking playing games with the food to consciously contradict and do the exact opposite of what I asked you to do. We want to

have a reputation for being accommodating to our customers and you're, like, being a subterfuge here, and you're, like, sabotaging what I'm trying to do, and you're messing with the way I pay my bills, and I'm not going to have it. I know you're terribly much more important than I am." I did not say that, but you get that kind of thing going on.

[2:16:13.3]

Justin Nystrom: Well, we're running on well past two hours [Marx laughs], and I guess we should probably, like—broader reflections on this. You've seen it all, I guess, seen most of it, a good deal of it.

[2:16:36.4]

Maggie Marx: Jesus Christ came for dinner at Christmas one year at the Brasseries.

[2:16:39.4]

Justin Nystrom: [Laughter] Oh, did you sing him "Happy Birthday"?

[2:16:42.9]

Maggie Marx: Well, actually, I couldn't see him, but the guy with him said that he was very upset, that Jesus was, because there were no fish specials—this was Christmas Eve—and that Jesus was a vegetarian. [Nystrom Laughter] So I've seen a lot.

[2:17:02.0]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, maybe he wanted to do the seven fishes.

Maybe he was Sicilian.

[2:17:07.7]

Maggie Marx: I don't think he was Italian at all. [laughter]

[2:17:14.2]

Justin Nystrom: If you were going to give advice to anybody who was out of college and trying to find their job and they thought it might exist in a restaurant, what would you tell them?

[2:17:25.1]

Maggie Marx: Go work in a restaurant. See what it is. See the reality of what it is you think you want to do, because it's extremely hard work, long hours, unpredictable. You have to have a love of the people or a love of food or a love of both. There has to be something driving you to want to be in that business.

[2:17:59.5]

Justin Nystrom: What was the best thing for you?

[2:18:01.3]

Maggie Marx: The people.

[2:18:03.2]

Justin Nystrom: Customers or coworkers?

[2:18:04.8]

Maggie Marx: Customer—well, coworkers, that instant dysfunctional family, too, because you do—you end up being very close with those people because they're all going through the same thing you are, and periodically you have to cry on somebody's shoulder or get sympathy from somebody, and we're all very simpatico back there, because we just go [demonstrates] [Laughter], you know, like this kale thing and now I have no tip. So I would share that with my waiter people.

[2:18:36.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[2:18:38.3]

Maggie Marx: But like I said, if you're good at what you do, you can go anyplace and get a job and support yourself. So I don't really—you know, I know that I'm not something of no value. I value myself, and I've heard tell that I do have some value by other people. [Laughter] I'm proud of what I did. I'm proud of this house. I'm proud of having supported myself my whole life. So I don't regret being in the restaurant business. I met a lot of really wonderful people as a result of it.

[2:18:38.3]

Justin Nystrom: Well, looking around here, it has all the elements of a pretty rich existence, I think, so—

[2:19:36.0]

Maggie Marx: [Laughter] Well, there are different ways to be rich. [Laughter]

[2:19:37.9]

Justin Nystrom: That's right, that's right. Well, Maggie, thank you so much for your time. This has been great. I've really loved hearing all about it, everything from the Hell's Kitchen to Key West to—

[2:19:49.2]

Maggie Marx: [Laughter] We've been a long ways this afternoon.

[2:19:53.3]

Justin Nystrom: —New Orleans. But we are the sum of our experiences. Thank you so much.

[2:19:57]

Maggie Marx: You're welcome.

[End of interview]