

DONNA CHERAMIE
Leeville Seafood Restaurant – Leeville, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen
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[Begin Donna Cheramie Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is Monday, October 17, 2011. I'm in Leeville, Louisiana at the Leeville Seafood Restaurant, and I'm sitting here with Miss Donna. Could I get you, please, to say your full name and tell me what you do for a living?

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Donna Cheramie: My name is Donna Cheramie, and I'm the manager of Leeville Restaurant, so I pretty much do everything I need to do here—ordering, scheduling, cooking, anything that needs to be done; paperwork all the stuff that comes with it.

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SR: Where did you grow up?

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DC: I grew up here, in Galliano, the Galliano area, and actually I was in Leeville a lot because my father is a trawler. So we used to—like I came in this area a lot--a lot when I was growing up, the shrimp sheds and next to the [water] guy's station. And you know this place wasn't maybe here when I was growing up, or it was here but it wasn't real popular back then. So but, this is one of my main areas. I was here when I was a child.

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SR: I forgot to ask you your birth date.

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DC: [*Laughs*] December 13, 1972.

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SR: Thank you. Well that's interesting. So you—did you grow up on shrimp boats?

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DC: Yes, I did. I grew up on the shrimp boats in the summertime when we were off of school. We had to go with our parents on the weekends—whatever.

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SR: Did you enjoy that?

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DC: Hmm, I'm not sure [*Laughs*] if I enjoyed it. It was work. And I don't know--I don't really like to be on the water too much anymore, so I guess maybe I didn't enjoy it because we had to do it all the time, so it was more like a job then. You know how some people like to just go and do it just to see what it's about? Well, we just had to do it, so I wouldn't say it was fun. [*Laughs*]

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SR: Is your family still in that business?

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DC: Yes. My dad and my mom still—they skim the local areas. They have, I think it's like a 42-foot boat, and that's where I get most of my big shrimp from—my dad. He catches them and he saves them for me and we get it from him.

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SR: Could you tell me your parents' names?

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DC: Daniel and Mary Bruce. They're from Galliano.

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SR: Well that's really interesting to me, too, that some of the seafood comes from family. Now you—how did you wind up here?

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DC: I was working at a restaurant in [Port] Fourchon. I met my husband there, and the same year we got married they [his parents] bought this restaurant. So actually they bought it before we got married, so we—so I started working for them from the beginning since they had it, so—. And on March 6th it'll be 15 years that we have the restaurant.

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SR: Can you tell me your husband's name?

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DC: Norrie Cheramie, and his parents are Harris and Sue Cheramie. They're the ones that own the restaurant.

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SR: So when you got married, did you know that you were entering the restaurant business?

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DC: Oh yes, I did. We—before I actually—we were dating when they bought the restaurant, so like he proposed to me in June; in March we opened. They opened, and in June we got engaged, and in October we were married, so all in the same year. [*Laughs*] Yeah, but I enjoy it. I really do. I really enjoy it, just serving people. It's serving good food and--and just, you know, making everybody happy. That's my main goal.

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SR: I suppose it's—in a way you've stayed—I mean you have stayed in the seafood business; you just don't have to be on the water anymore.

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DC: Right, right, and he asks me to go fishing with him all the time and I'm like, "No, I don't think so." But every—if I would go I would probably enjoy it, but it's just the idea of--to get me there. You know, but once I'm there I'd probably really enjoy it, but I'm just like—. When I hear of it I don't want to have nothing to do with it.

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SR: Now your husband, did he know that he wanted to go in the restaurant business or—did they have a family business before they bought this restaurant?

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DC: They actually—I mean I don't think anybody—it's just something that happened. My father-in-law's aunt owned the restaurant, and we had a marina—a motel marina—in Fourchon, and I don't know how it came about but it came about that she was ready to get out of it and he--he bought it from her. And when I met him there was no idea of them even having a restaurant. I was working at a restaurant, but there was no thoughts of them having a restaurant. It's just something that happened one day and just went from there.

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SR: I'm sorry—who did you say owned the marina?

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DC: Mr. Harris and Mrs. Sue Cheramie, yeah. So we sold it about six years ago. But they were—they had it when I met them. They were--they had the marina before they had the

restaurant. So they had both together for a few years. And then they sold all that and they kept this, I think mainly because I liked it so much and he knew, you know—I guess he felt I did a good job of running it for him, so—. You know he—it's still here.

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SR: What do you—I mean it's a really hard business, and especially for like a young person—I'm not sure how old. I didn't do the calculations of how old you are.

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DC: I'm 38, yeah.

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SR: So you were very young when you first started working here.

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DC: Yes.

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SR: It's a lot of responsibility. What do you think it was that--that appealed to you at such a young age?

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DC: I actually—I hear people complaining about it a lot, but I really love it and I don't even feel like that. I think it's just something that was meant to be, and I don't know. I believe in God and I just believe he brought me here with the people I work with, and I don't even feel like it's hard or anything like that. I enjoy it, and I enjoy everything about it.

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SR: That's impressive. When you—so you said that you do a little bit of everything here including cooking. Did you grow up cooking? I mean, I guess if you're on the shrimp boats or—was cooking around you?

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DC: No, not at all. Actually my mother-in-law is a great cook, and I didn't really get into cooking until I came around them and—and, you know, just enjoyed being around, like...she's a great cook. All the recipes came from her. She did all the recipes, and she's just real sick. She gets a lot of headaches, so it's hard for her to come, so you know it's been a while that she's been here because she's not really well. But she enjoys cooking for us still [*Laughs*]; it's not as much as cooking for like 100 people at a time and stuff like that. It gets really crazy in here sometimes, and our menu is very extensive from when she used to work here.

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We used to have like fried food and grilled food, and now we have all kinds of—we have different things now.

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SR: Yeah, tell me a little bit about how the restaurant has changed since you started working here.

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DC: I've always worked here, but I guess after a few years of just like fried seafood and grilled seafood I just kind of felt like we needed a little bit of a different change. And some of the sauces that she had, I just put it with steaks and--and I made different types of specials with it. Like we have a Leeville Filet; it's a filet with a horseradish sauce that she came up with, and so we put horseradish sauce with crabmeat and we have it with grilled shrimp and grilled asparagus, and we call that our Leeville Filet, and that's become a very, very popular dish.

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Just do bacon-wrapped filet. You know, just different, just—not just regular and plain steaks. You know, then we do an eight-ounce ribeye with a soft-shell crab with—kind of what you had. You had the crab patty special, but it's a sauce with the crabmeat on top. It's a--a ribeye with the soft-shell crab with the crabmeat and the sauce that you ate. And that's really popular also. I just kind of incorporated stuff that we already had here and just made little different dishes with it. You know, nothing complicated because we're—it is a small--it is a small restaurant. I mean the kitchen is small so you can't really do like tons of different things. But just doing just different little things like that.

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You know we have mahi now and tuna that we didn't have before. You know people just like—they like eating a little healthier, you know, than fried, fried, fried. So but I think most people come here and they know they're getting something that's fattening. And I think a lot of

people come over here and [think] like, “No, we can't eat light today,” you know because they -- they enjoy the food here and they—I guess it's their treat to come here and eat that fattening salad dressings. We don't have anything light. We make everything you know, so I guess it won't appeal to the—probably the dieter, so—. [*Laughs*]

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SR: When you first started working here—so the menu was a lot smaller, but was--was your mother-in-law already working here? Did she already have her hand in the kitchen?

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DC: Yes, when—yes, when I came they had—we all came together. You know, like she started it and we'd work here all day, her and I. You know she'd plan the freezer; we had to go take naps every once in a while, you know, because we started off really small. We didn't hire a lot--a lot of people at the beginning. We might have had one. We worked with two people in the kitchen and one waitress. And we'd do, like sometimes 40, 50, 60 people, you know.

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It was a little rough. For the first couple years we worked with just one waitress and two people in the kitchen. And then we got to three people in the kitchen. And then we got to four. And now we're back to three because it's—you know it's not as busy as it used to be before the bridge and--. I mean I don't think anything is going to be the same because the traffic doesn't pass through anymore. It goes around; it bypasses the businesses here in Leeville, so that is—we probably would be a lot busier now.

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SR: Yeah, can we talk about that a little bit? So I hadn't been here for a couple of years, to this area, and then I got instructions from someone who I was meeting on Grand Isle who said, "Give me a call once you get on the Leeville Bridge." And I didn't know what he was talking about until I got here. So it's a--it's a completely different path for the bridge to Grand Isle, huh?

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DC: Yes, it is. It bypasses the town of Leeville, so all the local businesses that were here don't get as much, I guess, attendance. You know even the gas stations and stuff like that; I think they got hurt a lot more than we did. Because we kind of were established, and so were they, but I guess they would probably have people that would stop by and get like soft drinks or stuff on their way down, and they didn't get that anymore.

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SR: Because the bridge used to be like right at the end of Leeville?

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DC: You had to pass through, yeah. You had to pass through the town of Leeville, and now it just bypasses the whole town.

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SR: Ah, so that affected your business, although there aren't a lot—there aren't restaurants between here and Grand Isle, are there?

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DC: Yeah; the--yeah they have Moran's in Fourchon, and so not really any that serve this type of food, but there are [some].

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SR: What would you call your type of food?

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DC: I have no idea. [*Laughs*] I mean, I guess seafood and steak. You know I mean that's basically it. I don't know—Cajun. I know we have a few—like we have the etouffée on the--on the [menu]. Gumbo, seafood gumbo. We're just not like—it's not overly spicy like I guess people say Cajun food is. Like some people like in Lafayette and stuff like that, they put a lot of spice in their food. I don't think our stuff is overly spicy that people can't eat it. So I would say Cajun but then they might not. [*Laughs*]

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SR: Is your mother-in-law Cajun?

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DC: Yes, we're all from Golden Meadow and the Galliano area.

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SR: One thing: I had the gumbo here, which I really liked. Could you describe it for me?

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DC: Hmm?

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SR: The gumbo—what kind of gumbo you have?

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DC: Oh, it's just a roux-based gumbo, seafood gumbo, that my mother-in-law—she put a lot of heart into it for it to come out the way it does because you know, once you get--get it, you can do it, but it takes a while for you to learn. It's the roux; just to get that roux just the right texture and everything, and she just—we have shrimp and crabmeat in it. And we used to put oysters in it a long time ago. Well before the oil spill we put oysters in it, and then once the oil spill came the oysters went up to so much money that we had to cut—it was like \$60 a gallon of oysters. So, and then a lot of people were like, “Oh, no oysters for our gumbo,” so I said, “Well, I guess we could just leave that out.”

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I mean it's still great without the oysters. I mean, but before we had oysters in it and now—and we have shrimp, crabmeat, sausage, and ham, and it's just the sausage and ham just adds the flavor, just helps bring a good flavor to a good Cajun gumbo I guess.

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SR: It's smoked sausage, right?

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DC: Yes, smoked sausage, yes.

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SR: And so your mother-in-law doesn't make that currently, though. Does she train—did she train someone?

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DC: Yes, yes, she comes in here and she trains the lady. Well she did—well they've been here that long, seven years. I have some people that have been with me seven years, so she came and showed them how to do it. And I also know how to do it, so if something doesn't come out right I can help them out—whatever they need help with, the lunches; a lot of lunch specials I'll cook them for them one or two times and then after that they will take it from there. And they do it just like you did it, which is good.

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SR: So you don't have a chef other than—?

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DC: No, no, we don't have a chef. We just have good people that cook good food. [*Laughs*]

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SR: The gumbo, is that typical of this area, that style of gumbo?

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DC: I would think so, yes. I mean for what I know. I mean that's how we make gumbo at home, and even if we put chicken in it we still have the sausage and the ham. You know our chicken gumbo is the same, roux-based. You just put chicken instead of shrimp in it, so that's--that's what I know and I don't really go anywhere(s) else, so—. [*Laughs*] I don't know what else they have.

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SR: I don't even—do people—well, yeah. I mean that brings me to your clientele. Do you get a lot of locals, or is it more people like me who are passing through?

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DC: Um, we do have a good local business, but our main clientele I would say comes from Baton Rouge because of the hotel across the street. They have a lot of—it's a big fishing —recreational fishermen come here a lot. And we get a lot from over there. You can tell when LSU plays, we're so dead. [*Laughs*] When they—before they got really big we were busy on the weekends, and then a lot of season holders—season pass-holders for LSU—are the ones that come fishing, so they stay home whenever they play, or even if they're away they watch them on TV. And we don't have a TV here. That's something I need to get, but I just have been—. Like at first, years ago, we were like, “We need to get a TV.” And then we're like, “Well, nobody is

going to leave if you get a TV.” **[Laughs]** And then we’re not like—now we’re like, “Hmm, I guess it’s better than not having anybody at all.” So I mean I’ve been thinking about it for years. I still don’t do it yet. But I’m not sure if—you know it’s something that, what if the game is late and nobody is going to want to leave? And then you’re going to be stuck here when you could be going for 8:30--9 o’clock, and then you can be here until 11:00. So it’s like, do you want to put yourself in that situation, I mean, or just keep the business you have? And everybody knows we don’t have a TV, so—. **[Laughs]** It’s like, just leave it that way.

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SR: I personally find it refreshing to not have a TV. It’s getting rare.

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DC: Right, you’re right. It--it is. I mean most of the places do have it because I guess it does bring business there, so—. It’s just a few months, though.

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SR: So you get a lot of recreational fishermen. What about did you get—did you have an uptick in business with like oil spill workers?

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DC: No, not at all. It was horrible. We went from doing like 150 people on the weekends to like 40 and 50 people. That’s where you could really tell where your business came from. That whole summer, because it happened like—I think May 20-something of last year was the day they said,

“Okay, the water is completely closed.” Then the following weekend was Memorial--Memorial weekend in May. Yes, and we did like 40 people, and we were like, “Wow.” From the [previous] Saturday we did like 140 people, to like the following weekend, the Friday and Saturday, we had only 40 people on the Friday and Saturday. The fishermen was our business.

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And then every once in a while—probably for about a month or so, we did like the 40 or 50 people on the weekends, and I guess that was like a few local people and a few of the oil spill workers. Every once in a while we’d have like 120 people and they were all locals. And we were like, “Ah, we can't do it,” because we were so used to not doing anything, and then they’d come and we would be like not prepared for it. So you weren't--just weren't--you didn't know what to expect. That’s the one thing about this business, is it’s so unpredictable. Like last Monday, for lunch I did 60 people; today they did 25. So I mean it’s—you can't tell from—like tonight, I mean we maybe did 20 people tonight whereas last Monday they did a few more. So it’s hard to tell how many people you need working because they do have to drive about 20 minutes to get here.

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SR: Your employees?

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DC: Yes, they have to drive there so it’s kind of like you don’t want them to come over here for nothing, you know. So it’s like at some point I do go to like one waitress at night. And then, actually last week I had one waitress on Wednesday and she did 60-some people by herself.

Every other night, but the Monday that she was there—and the Thursday night I had two waitresses and they didn't do anything. So that's what I mean about the unpredictable(ness) about it. It's when you don't have enough people, that's when they come [*Laughs*]—when you're not prepared. That's when they hit you, which is great. We'll take it, but it's like oh I wish you--you just could know.

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SR: And you live a ways away from here, too, huh?

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DC: Yes, I live about 30 to 40 minutes away. It's just depending on the traffic, so it's hard now. I used to come—I used to live like 10 minutes away. So it's going to be two years in December [that] we--we moved to Larose, and so I—it would be like nothing for them to call me and for me to hurry up and be here to help them. Now when they call me by the time I get here it's pretty much over with, so—.

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SR: So since the—so you had a big decrease in business after the oil spill. Has it caught up? Has it come back?

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DC: Yeah, some. I think some. The weekends, we did a—it's not, like I said, nothing like before, like before the bridge came up. I think, I mean I think just everything through the years

just—you know other restaurants opening around and the bridge and stuff like that. Like '07, we were doing almost 200 people on a Friday and Saturday night. And the, but then the bridge was I think—then the following year, we had a storm and then the bridge, and then you know it was like always—it's just something, one thing after another. So we've never had it since that year; it's never been that kind of business. I don't know, it's just—.

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SR: You mentioned the storm. Did you suffer damage from Katrina or Rita or Gustav?

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DC: All of them, actually, but Katrina and Rita, yes. We flooded. And Gustav and Ike; it was--it was the worst because the water came up to probably like right underneath the table in here.

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SR: So that's probably about three feet.

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DC: Yeah, three, yeah. It was pretty much destroyed. I mean they had—they gutted the whole restaurant out, and my father-in-law—that's when he comes in. [*Laughs*] He--he's the one that does that part when they have a storm like that. He gets us--gets people here and he cleans it up and gets it open for us. I think--I think it was Gustav and Ike, or—and then we were open back, I think, about the middle of October, so within a little over a month we were back open. He had changed the carpet and did you know a lot of redoing of everything. Our back building came

apart where we had storage. It was a mess. I wanted to cry. **[Laughs]** It was—so they just closed it off and just hurried up and get it back open, you know, quicker. He just shut—just put it back how it used to be before he added—. We had added on at some point after some hurricane **[Laughs]** before because we're not protected by the levee system. So we flood real easy here; if the storm comes the right way, the water, you know the wind is blowing the right way, whatever, it's just you know—. I guess every time hurricane season comes around we go, "Oh, are we going to flood this year or not?"

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So it's been like every four years so far we get—for some reason we—that's how often we flood, is every four years. We've been lucking out, I guess. I guess it's lucky to not flood the years in-between **[Laughs]**.

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SR: But that's a lot to deal with, knowing that that's just an inevitability.

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DC: Yeah, it is. It's hard because, I mean you have people that work for you and you know, you--you want them—you don't want them to go find something else, but there's nothing you can do for them because I mean you're shut down. I mean there's nothing you can do. I mean once--once you shut it down, I mean once something happens, once you flood, it's at least a month if you're lucky. You get the people--the right people in here to come and do everything for you, so that's like a month or so without them having a job, and I mean everybody needs to work, so you don't want them to go find something else. So you know I worry about everybody

else, is what I do. You know I mean that's one of my main concerns, is where are they going to go? You know, what's going to happen? So I think about them a lot. That's probably why I get so sick—I think about other people so much.

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SR: Yeah, I--I can understand that. But it's also—wow, it's just interesting to me that it's—. It must be worth it to keep rebuilding.

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DC: Uh, yeah, I think so. I think so. I mean if we can get everybody to come back here. So far most of the people that left, they all waited for us to open because for whatever reason they like working for me, so—. [*Laughs*] I mean I work with everybody, with all the girls that work here you know, and they're all raising children, and I work around their schedules. And I don't think—from what they tell me—I've been out of working for other people for 15 years, so I wouldn't know, but they say that not too many people work around your schedule and stuff like that. So I mean, and they all kind of help each other out and stuff. So I mean so they enjoy it here and I enjoy having them here. I mean it's a big help knowing that you have good reliable people to come to every day.

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SR: So is it mostly women in the kitchen?

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DC: Yes, it's all women.

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SR: And, like, local people who are used to this kind of food?

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DC: Yes.

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SR: What about—so where do you get your seafood? I know that you said that you get your shrimp from your parents. Is the other—are the crabs and the oysters and everything also from around this area?

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DC: Yes. I get [a lot of] it from Bob's Seafood. I got a lot of like the crabmeat. He--he is just kind of like a distributor where people sell to him and so you just go to one—it's kind of like a one-stop shop, you know; you get stuff with them, like the crabmeat, the oysters, and stuff like that—soft shell crabs. You know people sell them to him and so I get it from—it's easy for me to go to one place. Before I used to have to go here and get crabmeat and there and get oysters and there and get this and there and get that. And so now that he does you know a lot of the local—people go to him and sell it to him and I get it from him, so—.

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SR: Is there a difference between how local people order and tourist people order?

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DC: Well I don't know what you mean by a difference because a lot of the tours that come in are—like the fishermen, they come in. A lot of them are just, “I want something good,” or willing to get anything on the menu. And some people just want—I think like the local--the local people: “I know what I want.” You know like, “I want the flounder with the étouffée,” or you know they know what they want, when they want it, where—. I guess more of the tourists get different things. Like they'll try—that's where you sell a lot of your different stuff, too, you know are the tourists. And the locals get—they can get different things but you can tell the difference between them.

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SR: The locals migrate to certain dishes?

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DC: Right, yes.

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SR: Like what? Like the flounder, you said?

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DC: The flounder with the étouffée, and there's one man that he comes over here strictly just to eat the fried shrimp. He's like, "I'm going to eat the shrimp." That's it, you know, so I mean that's like they have it in their heads that's what they're doing and that's what they want and a lot of people that come here—. Our repeat customers like the fondue; you know there's a couple that comes almost every Saturday. They come to get the fondue, and one gets the crab patties and one gets the shrimp, but they always get basically the same thing almost every Saturday, so it's like—.

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SR: Can you tell me about the fondue? I haven't had that, but it looked intriguing. What is that?

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DC: Well fondue is just a cap bread and it's a sauce with—like a cheesy sauce with crabmeat and shrimp in it, and you just pour it in the bread and they just cut into it and eat it kind of like a pie.

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SR: What is cap bread?

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DC: It's a French bread. We get it from the local bakery. It's like a—it's just shaped like a round. It's not like a po-boy; you know it's a -round bread, so they call it a cap bread. I guess because it looks like a cap. I don't know; the shape of it—.

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SR: And can you tell me, for the record—I know this is a very popular dish in this part of the state, but it isn't everywhere—what crab patties are?

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DC: Crab patties are just crabmeat, a blend of crabmeat. We put like the claw meat, white meat, and it's just mixed with—we mix it with just a little bit of bread crumbs and seasonings and greens and stuff and just--just pat it together, and you put it in the freezer so it just stays that shape like you had tonight. So it stays in that little round shape and we stick it in the freezer so they don't fall apart, because if it would be fresh and you'd put it in the fryer it would just like probably shred up in the fryer. It wouldn't stay together. So you put it in and you freeze it and then you fry them straight from the freezer.

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SR: You deep-fry them?

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DC: Yes, we deep-fry them straight from the freezer. A lot of people do it different. Like some people put potatoes, which we put as little bread crumbs and stuff like that as we can so that there's a lot of crabmeat in it. It's mostly crabmeat. I mean probably 90-percent crabmeat if not 95-percent. It's just not much of anything else.

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SR: It was a lot of crab, and then also in my dish the sauce had more crab in it.

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DC: Yes, that was the jumbo lump crabmeat that they put on top with the sauce.

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SR: What is your favorite thing to eat here?

00:30:15

DC: Oh my goodness, a cheeseburger. **[Laughs]** Really I eat that more than anything, is a cheeseburger. I really eat—I don't know; I like everything. I couldn't tell you if I had anything favorite because, like, we have a shrimp pasta on the menu and for years somebody's like, "Oh, that's okay but that's not my favorite." And I'm like, "Oh, me either," and then another one will be like, "Wow, this is really good." And then one of the girls that work here was like, "You know your taste buds change every seven years," so I'm like, "Well, oh, maybe." **[Laughs]** But I'm like, "Wow, this is good all of the sudden." And it's not that I dislike it because some people come here and that's all they want, is the shrimp pasta. So but some people might not like it. You know there's a lot of things that just some people may not like, but that was just one thing for me that I didn't like at first, but now I eat it a lot. **[Laughs]**

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SR: Before your in-laws bought the restaurant, was it called the Leeville Seafood Restaurant?

00:31:20

DC: Yes, it closed. It was the Leeville Seafood Restaurant. That's a story all on its own. The lady that owned it before, they say she was funny and like just whatever was on the menu was on the menu. Like we do—a lot of people don't realize, we do half-and-half platters, or you know we'll substitute. Well with her, you couldn't substitute. You got what it was; that was it. If they didn't have like a seafood platter, like if she served shrimp, oysters, and fish on it and they didn't have fish, well you couldn't even have a seafood platter. Like it was—there's so many stories. That's probably—she's passed away now, but people come in here and still say how funny it was.

00:32:08

But you know some people she would lock the door on. When they would be walking up the step and she'd lock the door. It was just an old couple and they worked by themselves and like one time she hired waitresses and she saw how much money they made so she told them that they couldn't come back. *[Laughs]*

00:32:23

SR: Because they made too much?

00:32:24

DC: Because they made money. She saw the money they made and she's like, "Oh, y'all can't come back over here." *[Laughs]* But you know it was like—she wanted ketchup. They would like pick the ketchup up and be putting ketchup on a plate and she'd grab it out of them and say,

“Okay, you’ve had enough,” or stuff like that you know. There’s a lot of funny stories. I mean I couldn’t even think of barely any of it—just the few I could think of—but a lot of people still come in here and say, “I remember when that lady used to own this restaurant.”

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And actually, I mean we had to build it up from—like some people thought it was funny but some people didn't come here because—. And a lot of people don't—they didn't even know it existed because she had just random hours, like--like she wasn't open. Like she'd open for a little while and then she'd close and then she'd come back and open. You know, so she just had really random hours and—.

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As a matter of fact, when my father-in-law was coming to buy it he called her from Fourchon. He's like, “Are you there?” She was like, “Yes.” “I'm on my way,” he said. She's like, “Okay.” Well whenever he got here she wasn't here no more. **[Laughs]** She had left. They were coming to eat and she had—she knew—Fourchon at the time was like 10 minutes away. So they came right straight here and she had already left.

00:33:39

SR: Did she know she was going to sell the restaurant to him?

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DC: I think that's kind of when it all started, at that time. But you know I don't know; she was just--just a funny lady. You know I mean—and I love hearing her stories. I wish I could remember half of them because they're really cute just to hear. And people still—some people

still kept coming, like I said, and some people were just like, “Uh-uh, that’s a mean lady.”

[Laughs]

00:34:06

But a lot of people like still—some people that come to Leeville are still finding out that we’re here 15 years later, which is something that could have been established so long ago because it’s been—she had it for 20 years, so it’s like 35 years it’s been here. We have local people that still don’t know we exist. You know like local people in Larose and stuff like that.

00:34:31

SR: I guess if they just get on the bridge...I don’t know. It seems pretty prominent to me.

00:34:35

DC: Yeah, and a lot of people—we do get local people, but a lot of people think, “Oh, Leeville is just so far.” They don’t want to come to Leeville. So I mean it’s a great location in the summertime because of the fishermen, but in the wintertime it’s really—it slows down so much, like it’s kind of like a night like this in the wintertime, every night. We don’t have any busy nights, whereas if we had been located locally we’d probably be really busy. But I guess you got to take the good with the bad. **[Laughs]**

00:35:05

SR: Right. So you--you run with the—basically the recreational fishing seasons?

00:35:08

DC: Right, yes, ma'am. And we get a few Christmas parties from the local companies, but not really too many. Maybe five or six.

00:35:20

SR: I've seen some take-out happening since I've been in here.

00:35:23

DC: Yes, we do a few take-outs. I mean it just depends. Like every day is different. I mean we may get one or two a day. We get a few for lunch. We get a few lunch orders or whatever the lunch is, because it depends on if that's what they feel like eating. We have maybe three or four people that call every day to see what our lunch is and if they're going to come get it or not.

00:35:43

SR: Oh, because you have specials?

00:35:43

DC: Yes, we just do like fried chicken on Thursdays, and we do like hamburger steak specials and just different—like we had red beans today. But I don't always have red beans, so it was just different. Fried pork chops, spaghetti, just little kind of home-cooked meals just to stray away from the fried food every once in a while.

00:36:08

SR: Are you the one who decides what that's going to be?

00:36:12

DC: Yes, unfortunately.

00:36:15

SR: Do you do all the ordering also?

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DC: Yes, I do the ordering and everything. I know some people say that—but it's really not bad. I don't know why because if it's a small restaurant I'm not sure. I mean I have 12 people that work for me, so it's really not—. I don't think it's bad. **[Laughs]** I don't know; it doesn't seem bad to me.

00:36:36

SR: Well that's good. That means you're in the right business.

00:36:38

DC: Right. I think about that a lot too. **[Laughs]**

00:36:41

SR: Your husband, he doesn't work here regularly?

00:36:45

DC: No. He'll pick up seafood for me and stuff like that, and he helps out with my children. So I guess if you could say that—that leaves me time to come here. I'll call him an employee because he helps me--he helps me with my kids, so—. **[Laughs]** His kids, too, but you know if I--if I had to leave them with someone else I don't think I would be doing what I was doing. You know if they had to be with a stranger or a babysitter or anything like that—. You know it gives me peace of mind that they're at home in the home environment even when I'm not here—you know, even when I'm not home, but you know they are taken care of, so—. That helps me to do this better, I would think, so that I'll say he's—. **[Laughs]**

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SR: And your children—how old are they?

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DC: Six and eleven.

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SR: Do they come hang out here ever?

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DC: Not too much anymore because we left—but they grew up here, both of them. My six-year-old especially because of—that's when I started kind of just mainly managing it and not actually waitressing or in the kitchen. So before that I was either waitressing or in the kitchen and managing it. And then I'd say for the past six years, and unless I'm needed somewhere(s), I just

mainly manage and help out. So he actually would come with me to work for the first three years of his life. He came to the restaurant with me and he stayed in the office and he's actually good. He wasn't wanting to climb on the tables or **[Laughs]** anything like that. You know he didn't go in the kitchen. You know he didn't do anything he wasn't supposed to. So he—and both of them actually grew up here, but mainly I would say he did because of the managing part because I wouldn't bring them if I had to waitress or cook.

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That would be too hard to look out for them, so I wouldn't bring them if I was—. So that's why with me not actually waiting on tables or in the kitchen I could still watch over him and help out, so—.

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SR: Well I need to wrap this up because both of us are running out of time, but let me ask you just one final question: What is your favorite part about your job here?

00:39:11

DC: I just love it. I don't know, I just love the whole thing. I enjoy just, I guess, the different aspects of it, just the fast pace. I love getting people in and out and I don't--I don't like when people don't like their food. **[Laughs]** That I don't like. That makes me sad. But I enjoy it like when people compliment us on the food and the service. You know, like I strive to get the girls that work here just to get—to be on top of their tables and take care of their people, and that's the main thing I enjoy—serving people, I guess. And I enjoy having good people to work for me.

00:39:55

SR: Well thank you so much for the spur-of-the-moment interview. It was really, really generous.

00:40:00

DC: That's the best way to catch me, is spur-of-the-moment, because I never know when I could—. I could plan something and then something could come up. So you caught me at a good time actually. [*Laughs*]

00:40:13

SR: Thank you so much.

00:40:16

DC: You're welcome.

00:40:18

[End Donna Cheramie Interview]