

WAYNE BAQUET
Lil' Dizzy's Café—New Orleans, LA

Date: July 17, 2007
Location: 610 Poydras Street—New Orleans, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 38 minutes
Project: Southern Gumbo Trail

[Begin Wayne Baquet Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Tuesday, July 17, 2007 and I am in New Orleans, Louisiana. Could I get you to state your name and your birth date and how you make your living, please?

00:00:16

Wayne Baquet: My name is Wayne Baquet, Sr. I was born May 3, 1947, and I'm in the restaurant business, and I've been in the restaurant business for 40 years. And the name of my—my current restaurant is Lil' Dizzy's Café.

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SR: Could—before we get to your historical background, can you tell me how that name came about?

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WB: Sure. I've had several restaurants, several different names, and one of the restaurants was named after my grandson, Zachary Baquet, and it was called Zachary's, and I had that restaurant for like 13 years. And—got an opportunity to step back, because I was doing lunch and dinner, and just to back off—got a good sale and sold it. And then I got restless and wanted to open up another restaurant, and I wanted to come up with another name. So I found a location on Esplanade and North Robertson Street in Treme and—and in the process of getting it the way I wanted it to I had to talk to my grandson, Zachary. And I called and I got a message on his cell

phone and he said, *You got me, it's Lil' Dizzy*. And I said, *Perfect. This will work just fine*. And then I called him and I said, *Well you know, I know you play the trumpet and is that your nickname: Lil' Dizzy?* And he said, *Sure, that's my nickname because I do pretty well on the trumpet and they named me—all my friends call me Lil' Dizzy after Dizzy Gillespie*. So that's how we named the restaurant Lil Dizzy's.

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SR: That's great. So it's the same inspiration as Zachary's?

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WB: The same inspiration. He, Zach, is my good luck charm. In fact he'll be playing at this particular restaurant, which is just our second Lil' Dizzy's that we're sitting in, on Sundays. He and his friends are students at St. Augustine High School, and he's a heck of a trumpet player. He can really blow that horn, so they'll—this will be—they will be playing a five piece band—will be playing at our Sunday jazz brunch.

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SR: All right, thanks. That's a good story. Can you tell me a little bit about your heritage, your family background?

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WB: My heritage, my family background is that my family—I could trace my family roots in the Baquet family back 200 years in New Orleans. We've had quite a few musicians in the

family, so we come from a musical background family. In fact, George Baquet, who is my father's uncle, is—and Charles Baquet, my grandfather's brother, is one of the originators of jazz. He was Sydney Bechet's teacher. Also his sister, Eda Baquet Gross, got us all started in the restaurant business in 1947, when it was a place called Paul Gross Chicken Shack, where we was famous for our fried chicken. And until this day we're still famous for our fried chicken. And I've taken the name to a new level, because my father opened up his restaurant called Eddie's, and actually I was a college student at the time, and I was there to open it up with him, and since then I've opened up 11 additional restaurants. So I've been quite busy in my last 40 years of running restaurants.

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SR: What was your aunt's name?

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WB: My aunt's name was Eda Baquet Gross.

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SR: So E-d-a?

00:03:51

WB: Right.

00:03:53

SR: Okay, and—and the name of her restaurant was?

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WB: Paul Gross Chicken Shack.

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SR: How do you spell that?

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WB: Paul Gross--P-a-u-l--Gross--G-r-o-s-s Chicken Shack. It was a 24-hour restaurant back in the day, and that's how we got started. So we have one of the oldest restaurant families in New Orleans.

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SR: And I know you have several siblings who are in various professions. Was it always clear to you that you were drawn to the restaurant business?

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WB: I think it was clear for me from, just about from the beginning. I even told the story to some of my friends this morning, how I planned my senior prom, rented a hall, and got the food catered, and so that we could have a private party for us and our dates back—and that was in 1965. So I guess you could say it's always been in my blood. I think I went through a period there where I wanted to get away from it, when I first got married and it was just a little bit too

much for me. And I got away from it for a couple of years and then realized this is—this is my calling. This is what I need to do. So it's—I've been doing it a long time.

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SR: And your family is Creole, New Orleans Creole. Can you define that for me?

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WB: Sure, I'd be glad to. The real Creole people of New Orleans is a mixture of the French, Spanish, American Indian, and African, because these are the people that inhabited New Orleans back in the day. And they had to intermingle to survive, and that's what happened. That's why when you come to New Orleans, you see black folks with all these different colors. Some of them you can't even tell what they are. Some of them look Oriental, some of them look white, some of them look black, you know, all mixtures of colors because of this total mixture, this melding pot mixture, this gumbo of people that we have including—and then as time went on, we even had the Italian input, you know. So all of that mixed together—these are the people in New Orleans, and that's what I am—me and my family result—that's what the Creole people are.

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SR: And how about Creole food? How would you define that?

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WB: Creole food is the food, the product of Creole people. And that's—that's exactly how you define it. It—it evolved. It's taking food and having a passion for food, and that's what we do. We do things here that you can't do and can't find anyplace else. We make our own sausages, we make our own stews, gumbos and jambalaya and stuffed peppers, and if you travel anywhere else outside of New Orleans you can't find it. You can go to Baton Rouge and you can't even find our French bread the way we do it here. Leidenheimer's French bread—you see because we're below sea-level, we're able to bake the best bread. You can go to France and you can't find bread like we have here in New Orleans. So, and—and you do know that gumbo is an African word. It means okra. So you know gumbo is one of our main dishes. You know we—we don't open up one of our restaurants without having gumbo.

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SR: Can you describe Lil' Dizzy's gumbo for me?

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WB: I'll describe Lil' Dizzy's gumbo as the best gumbo, period, in New Orleans. I'll put it up against any gumbo at any of the big houses, all the big chefs. This gumbo was perfected by my father and the—the strategy was that we would make the roux ahead of time, and we would take the roux and bag it up so that all of the gumbo tasted the same wherever we went. And it has worked for me over the years. So whether I open up an Eddie's or a Zachary's or a Lil Dizzy's, we have the gumbo mix roux that will make it taste the same all the time. If everybody would follow their instructions, it would be perfect.

00:08:11

SR: So you mean you make the dry roux without the—without oil or with the oil?

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WB: We make the dry roux without oil, okay. We take it and we bake it in the oven with all the different seasonings that we put with it, and we bake it in the oven. You just baste it with a little—a little oil, but you don't—it's not a wet ruc. It's a dry roux. You bake it. When you start off, it's a flour that's white. When you finish, you bake it to the color that you want it to be and then you take it and you bag it up or container it up. And then you take and the next—and when you have to make gumbo, you put a pot of water on and throw the mix in there and stir it up good, throw all your ingredients in, and let it cook down and—boom, you have gumbo.

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SR: I haven't heard—I haven't heard of that technique before. And so can—what color does your flour get to?

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WB: The flour gets to a brown color, a light brown color, a light brown color, and that—that's how we, that's how we do it.

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SR: And what else—what else is in your gumbo here?

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WB: Well we—the way we make our gumbo, we put crab, shrimp, our own homemade hot sausage that we make, smoked sausage and ham. Those are the ingredients that we put. Those are the—what we put in the gumbo. Now sometimes during the Lenten season, when we have to have a seafood gumbo, then we'll change that around. We use the same roux, but we'll use oysters, shrimp, crab and crawfish, and eliminate all of the meats. But on a normal basis we—we have a mixture of meat and seafood in the gumbo.

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SR: Do you use okra or filé in your gumbo?

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WB: We do okra—you can't mix okra and filé. According to the laws of New Orleans gumbo-making, you don't mix those two things together. So we do an okra gumbo sometimes, and sometimes we do a filé gumbo, but we don't mix it. The okra gumbo is not made from that roux; it's made from another recipe that we have. But our gumbo, our signature gumbo is our filé gumbo. Our okra gumbo is very good, but the gumbo that everybody comes to get everyday, seven days a week, is our Creole filé gumbo.

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SR: Can you tell me at what point you put the filé in?

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WB: At the end. It's the last thing—after you cook everything now and you've got just the right texture and color and you want—and the filé is going to thicken it. That's your thickener, so you add your filé at the end and stir it in and then that's the finished product.

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SR: Is the same gumbo recipe that you would use—that you used at Zachary's, then?

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WB: It's the same gumbo recipe we used at Eddie's for years, at Zachary's, at Café Baquet's, and now at Lil' Dizzy's. It's the same gumbo that we've used at all of our restaurants since my dad started this recipe around 1970. So we've been using this recipe for gumbo for now—what would that be?—close to 40 years.

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SR: What was your dad's name—or is?

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WB: My dad is deceased, and his name was Edward Joseph Baquet, Sr.

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SR: When you were growing up, who did the cooking in your house, and what was that gumbo like?

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WB: The two best cooks—the three best cooks I know are my wife, my mom, and my mother-in-law. So when I was growing up, contrary to what people believe, my dad was a mail carrier who went into the restaurant business with his aunt, but my mom was the cook. She cooked everything. And she can really cook, you understand. So she cooks everything from scratch, and that's the way she wants to do it. My mother-in-law doesn't cook anymore, but she lives with me and my wife and—but my wife learned how to cook from her, and I would say 90-percent of the recipes that we use—the pot recipes that we use in the restaurant—are recipes from my wife, because that's the way it evolved. And it was my decision, being the restaurateur, to make a decision about what recipes we were going to use, you know. For example, crawfish bisque is a lost art. When we decided to start doing crawfish bisque some 19 years ago in the Jazz and Heritage Festival—that's how long we've been doing crawfish bisque—in that particular festival I had to use my grandmother's recipe, which my mom had to cook for us, which was crawfish bisque in a brown gravy, which is the original way it was fixed. And then my wife's recipe, which she got from her mother, which was crawfish bisque in a light Creole gravy—not a real tomato gravy but a light Creole gravy. And I made the choice that the one in the light Creole gravy was better, and that's the one that we use.

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SR: All right. And so your wife is New Orleans Creole also?

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WB: Oh straight up New Orleans Creole. You—you—written all over my wife and my kids. I could show you pictures of my kids and my grandkids and, yeah, my wife is Creole. Her name is—maiden name is Jourdain—J-o-u-r-d-a-i-n. And since I am into genealogy, I traced her family tree too back 200 years. And some kind of way, we have an inter-mixture in there some kind of way. Because our family tomb, which is in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1, which is the oldest burial site in New Orleans and one of the oldest burial sites in the country, on my mom's side—on the Duplessis side—has my wife's maiden name on the tomb. So I mean we haven't been able to explain that, but that's a fact of life.

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SR: What neighborhood did you grow up in?

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WB: I grew up in what you call Treme, the Sixth Ward—the Treme area, St. Peter Claver. I know that don't mean anything to you. St. Augustine. You know right—right around where my Lil' Dizzy's is at on Esplanade, but I was closer to Broad Street. I was—I grew up on Rocheblave Street between Dumaine and Saint Ann, and you could walk to St. Peter Claver, nine blocks to St. Peter Claver or three blocks to the Carver Theater, you know everything. You walked everywhere, you know, because not everybody had cars back then. But a great old mixed neighborhood, a really nice mixed old neighborhood—that's where I grew up at.

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SR: So you kind of came home when you—when you went from Zachary’s to Lil’ Dizzy’s [the first, Esplanade Avenue, location]?

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WB: Exactly. When I went from Zachary’s to Lil’ Dizzy’s, I did come home. In fact I used to have a restaurant—one of my restaurants is a half a block from where Lil’ Dizzy’s is. It’s on Claiborne right around the corner, and it was called Eddie Baquet’s Restaurant. It was named after my father. That was our second restaurant. So we ran that for about three years, so I came home when I came to Lil’ Dizzy’s, exactly. And it’s been good for me. I’m doing business. I’m doing very well.

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SR: Do you live in that neighborhood now?

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WB: I live in Gentilly now. I guess you could say I live in—between the Lakeview, like in the Seventh Ward. I live in a condominium on Bayou St. John, which is really, really nice, on the first floor. And you know I try to work hard every day, go home in the evening, you know and get me a nice glass of red wine and chill out and relax. And—and that’s kind of like what I do.

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SR: I don’t know if you—if you ever make gumbo at home. I guess maybe your wife does the cooking, but if you’re—if y’all are going to make a gumbo at home, what is it like?

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WB: It's very similar to the gumbo that we make at the restaurant—very, very similar. Cooks are very possessive people. My wife—my wife's brothers and sisters all use the recipe, because I could give them the mixture so that they could make gumbo. They love it, you know. Even the ones that's living in Atlanta and Houston because of the storm, when they come home: *Give me some of that gumbo mix you got.* But my wife does it from scratch because that's her—that's her choice. That's how she wants to do it. I don't cook at home, at all you know. She does all the cooking. I mean I see enough all day. My passion is breakfast. I could—that's my passion. I could cook breakfast with the best of them. I could make the best omelets, cook the best grits, hash browns, you know and I love—I love it. I could do anything for breakfast. You mention it, I could do it. So that's my passion, and my love is the breakfast part. As far as lunch goes, my passion is being out here and meeting the people and seeing that the restaurant is being operated properly. But as I tell my personnel all the time, I could go back and do whatever it is that needs to be done in that kitchen—whatever it is, whether we've got to put on a pot of gumbo, put on a pot of red beans, whether we have to expedite and get the food out—I could do it all. And that's what I do.

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SR: You have had a lot of practice. [*Laughs*] Let me just go back for one minute. So can you just give me your childhood memories of gumbo, like what your mom's was like?

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WB: My mom's gumbo was super—superb. And even growing up—even after—when I got married, then we would go by my mother-in-law because she had a big family. We would go there every day, and her gumbo every Sunday was superb. So we're a gumbo family. You know we really are. I mean we're a New Orleans Creole food family. But gumbo is one thing that we—we eat gumbo at least once a week. Everybody in the family eats gumbo at least once a week. So it's just a natural thing—like red beans, we love red beans. We eat red beans at least once a week, you know.

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SR: And it's still—it seems to me that in my observations of New Orleans culture, it's—even though it's very common, it's a celebration to eat gumbo.

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WB: It's a celebration to eat gumbo. It's a celebration to eat—to eat Creole food. It's a celebration to create things. It's—but gumbo is right on top, one of the top items, the melding pot of everything is the gumbo. But I mean it's a celebration for us. I mean we have a passion for food. You know when I lived in Atlanta, when the storm hit—after a couple of weeks of trying some of these restaurants, that just didn't do it for us and we started fixing gumbo and red beans and making our own hot sausage right at home. But my passion was breakfast. I had 17 of us living in the same house and I'm an early morning starter, so 4:30--5 o'clock in the morning I had the grits on, the sausage cooking, the bacon cooking, making biscuits and said, *Let's get ready to go*. And I—I enjoyed it: watching the kids go to school and watching my daughter go to work, my son-in-law go to work, and you know and—and that's what I did.

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SR: How long were you in Atlanta?

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WB: It seemed like six months, but I was only there for two months. I had to come back and get my restaurant open. I was only there for two months. I left my wife there to get the restaurant open. She—she joined me after maybe four months, you know, but I was only there two months but the minute I could get over here and find a place to live and get myself started and get the restaurant started, that's what I had to do. I had—I had to get my income going and make something happen. Even—I was even approached about opening up a restaurant in Atlanta, and I said you know, *Why am I going to go through that expense?* I already have one in New Orleans, you know.

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SR: Are there other people in your family involved in the business?

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WB: Yeah. Well everybody was involved at some time or another. All of my brothers worked for me over the years. They're all professionals now with the exception of my younger brother, Rudolph, who works for me at the Esplanade restaurant. He works for me: he seats people, bus tables, do whatever it takes you know. So Rudolph works for me. My wife takes care of all of the paperwork so I don't have to do that, you know, because I'm always on the job. My son has

helped me in the restaurant business quite a bit. He's—he's helping me with this one, you know.
So I think as far as the family members go that's about it.

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SR: How many siblings do you have?

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WB: I have one—my oldest brother, Eddie, Edward Baquet, Jr., is deceased. He was in business with us. And then I have three other brothers. Two of them are journalists: Dean Baquet is—was the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, and now he is the editor of the *New York*—he's the *New York Times* Washington affiliate editor. My brother, Terry Baquet, is the front-page editor for the *Times Picayune*, and Rudolph works for me.

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SR: That's interesting: two journalists. Did you have other journalists in the family?

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WB: No, they don't—they're the only journalists, right.

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SR: So I'm curious: this morning I did an oral history interview with a Cajun gumbo maker. At what point in your life did you—were you aware of Cajun food? Was that a part of your consciousness all growing up, or—?

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WB: Cajun is not New Orleans. And you won't find any Cajuns walking around New Orleans. Cajun is more like a country Creole thing. You're going to find that in Lafayette and the outlying parishes. Cajuns are folks that, with another heritage—but it's really strange. Remember they came down from Canada, okay, and settled in the outlying parishes of Louisiana. The cooking is very similar. Their food is a little bit more peppery than ours is. And then some of the intermingling, you know, like I have cousins that are Cajun-Creole. Okay, so in Point A La Hache you know—so they're Cajun and they're Creole, okay, but when you come to New Orleans the heritage here is Creole. It's not Cajun. I wasn't even aware of Cajun for a long, long time. I think Paul Prudhomme, with his very successful restaurants, made Cajun popular in New Orleans. And people still come and say, *I'm going to that Cajun restaurant*. It—he may have the only Cajun restaurant in New Orleans. The rest of us are Creole.

00:23:44

SR: What about rules of gumbo? You said earlier that you never marry okra and filé in the same gumbo. What would you say some other rules are?

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WB: Well that's—that's definitely an ongoing rule, and the reason why I said that is because a lot of folks come from out of town, like these companies like Arrow-Sysco and all of that, and they come in and they sell people different mixtures that's got okra and filé mixed together. So we don't do that. Other rules of gumbo is that it's got to be rich and robust. Can't be watery, can't

be watered down. All versions of Creole gumbo are very similar. You got the similar texture, thickness, you know. I mean some other people that come in and try to do things and make a gumbo with too heavy a roux, and it's tasting more like a roast beef gravy with meat and seafood in it—people make that mistake. That's a big one, you know. I'll be honest with you: I find, unfortunately, that a lot of the restaurants in New Orleans now, I don't like their gumbo. I don't know why it has evolved as such. But I—I won't even mention any names, but like I went out to dinner about three weeks ago to one of the major restaurants—me and my wife—and one of the guys that was playing music who's got—an old musician who has been playing for years at all of the big houses. He told me, he said, *Why don't you go back there and show those people how to cook some gumbo?* I said, *Man, I can't do that. I just won't order their gumbo, that's all.*

[Laughs]

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SR: Is it that a lot of New Orleans restaurant gumbo is too dark or too thick, or—?

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WB: I think what you're doing is you've imported so many people from out of the state that want to put their little niche on our gumbo, and when they do it just don't come out right. You know what they said: *If it ain't broke, don't try to fix it*, you know.

00:25:51

SR: When you were growing up and used—people used filé in their gumbo, did you get that at the grocery store or did you know people who were grinding their own sassafras?

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WB: Oh, we knew people that was grinding their own. You know they would bring it to us from the country and all that stuff. So it wasn't no big item in the grocery store, I guess. By the time I got to be 15 or 16 or 17, then you—even when I was growing up, they didn't even have supermarkets. They had, you know they had one supermarket called Schwegmann's, but other than that it was the corner grocery store, and the corner grocery store would get that fresh filé, you know from wherever it is that they would get it from. Different people did it different ways, you know, and we'd also—. See, the old way that they would take the sassafras leaves and—if you've ever seen it done—and you take this big wooden block and it's got a big cavity in it, and you put the leaves down in there and you pound it and pound it and pound it until it becomes more like a powder—that's fresh filé, you know.

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SR: Well that's interesting that—it seems like it's really hard to come by these days, the fresh kind.

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WB: If you look enough you could find it. It's like finding fresh okra and different things. It's like making sure you keep with the tradition of—keeping—when you're cooking your gumbo or you're cooking your seafood, that you're using Louisiana products. Like we use Louisiana shrimp you know. We don't short-change that. Or we use Louisiana oysters and you know—and our own homemade hot sausage, and our own Chisesi ham and things like that. All—all of that is very important, and when you leave and try to go someplace else, that's why it's so hard to cook,

you know. I mean you can't even find pickle meat in Atlanta. You can't find pickle meat. You can't have red beans or white beans without—or greens—without pickle meat, you know.

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SR: I don't think you can find pickle meat anywhere else.

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WB: You think? Well I didn't know that, but I know that you can't find pickle meat any—in Texas and Georgia, you can't find pickle meat. But you're saying you can't find it no place else; you're probably right.

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SR: I don't know. I live in Pennsylvania right now, and no one has even heard of that.

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WB: And you've tasted pickle meat, huh?

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SR: Oh yeah.

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WB: Oh man, pickle meat and some red beans, huh?

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SR: So you mentioned you make your own hot sausage. Does—does that go in the gumbo?

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WB: That goes in the gumbo. This is a recipe that Janet and I—my wife and I—created maybe 25 years ago when we had a problem getting a hot sausage that we liked with consistency. So in—in our kitchen we created our own hot sausage recipe, just with ground meat and ground pork and different seasonings and onions and garlic and all that good stuff, and we created our own hot sausage, and we've been rolling with it ever since. And it definitely is something that goes in the gumbo. In fact, people comment on it all the time: *Where did you get that hot sausage from?* I said, *Well we made it*, you know.

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SR: I heard someone commenting on it when I walked in actually.

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WB: Good, good.

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SR: And you also make your own hot sauce?

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WB: Right. This is—this hot sauce is not a product that I make. I have a partner here, Kevin Belton, and he is friends with some people who makes this very good hot sauce. So we thought it was a very good idea if we—why not use—instead of using the store-bought, this Louisiana thing and whatever, and this is a much, much better hot sauce. He could give you more details exactly on who this is ‘cause I’m—this is his thing, and it says Cajun too—a-ha. **[Laughs]**

00:29:37

SR: Is it challenging if you have cooks who weren’t brought up in the Creole tradition to—to get them to cook your food? Tell me about that. **[Laughs]**

00:29:48

WB: It is challenging every time I open up a restaurant, and I try to tell my cooks that I hire that you have to cook the same gumbo here that I have over at the other Lil Dizzy’s, the same red beans, the same jambalaya, same greens. And you have these other people that come from all these different houses—Paul Prudhomme, Commander’s Palace, you know—and for some reason they come over with us. And they will tell me, *Well this is how we do it*. And I have to tell them all the time, *That’s not the way we do it here. You’ve got to do it my way, okay*. And that is a challenge. I’ve only been open like four weeks [at Lil’ Dizzy’s second location], and I’ve already run across people—at least two or three people—that have fought that, you know vehemently saying *Well this is how we fry chicken*. I said, *Well your fried chicken don’t taste like my fried chicken, so we’re going to fry it my way*. So in fact we’ve been through that. Even today, you know. Even last week. So that is a challenge, yes.

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SR: I would imagine—and just for the record on the fried chicken topic, you made fried chicken at Jazz Fest for many years too, right?

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WB: I did fried chicken at Jazz Fest for about 13—14 years running. I decided just last year not to do the fried chicken because I didn't want to go through the hassle. It's a hard job. Frying chicken outdoors, you got to have six deep fryers, you've got to have people seasoning, frying. It takes 10 people to fry chicken in the festival. I said, *I don't want to do that anymore*. Did that enough, didn't make enough money doing it, so I changed my item. I do a crawfish bisque. I do Creole filé gumbo. And I do trout Baquet: trout topped with lump white crabmeat in a lemon butter sauce. And I did very well. I did better than I ever did this year.

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SR: Great. Jazz Fest has very high food standards.

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WB: High food standards, and we were—we were rated as one of the top food vendors in the Jazz Fest. We've been rated that way every year, but I think we went up a notch this time. I really do.

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SR: What about—do you use just water for your gumbo, or do you use stock?

00:32:17

WB: Just water. Just water we use for the gumbo. You know we don't go to the—the process of doing a stock. You don't have to. From the mixture that we have, it comes out super great. And I would say basically my wife, she uses a stock. And her gumbo is great, but it—the difference between them is not that big a deal.

00:32:41

SR: And what about, to you is thyme a key ingredient for Creole gumbo or not? I've heard that.

00:32:48

WB: I think thyme is a key ingredient. And I think thyme is something you have to be careful of. If you put too much thyme in it, you could—it could take away from the total taste of the gumbo. So you have to be real, real careful with thyme. But thyme and bay leaf is an important part of a gumbo.

00:33:02

SR: And how about your seasoning vegetables: do you use celery?

00:33:08

WB: Yeah, we use onion, garlic, and celery. And those are—you know and bell pepper. Okay, those are seasoning items.

00:33:19

SR: I don't want to take up too much more of your time, but—

00:33:21

WB: Well you know you—you would ask, people would ask you what is a trinity, you know.
You've heard of that?

00:33:28

SR: Uh-huh.

00:33:28

WB: Okay, so I guess my wife would say the trinity would be—our trinity would be onion,
garlic, and celery.

00:33:40

SR: Bell pepper wouldn't be in there?

00:33:44

WB: Sometimes. Sometimes you've got to make it more than a trinity. **[Laughs]**

00:33:50

SR: I wanted to ask—so when you eat—now and when you were growing up—. Rice is a key component for gumbo for most people. Did you ever eat it with anything else, like potato salad or—?

00:34:05

WB: They have people that put potato salad in their gumbo, but I think they also have the rice in there too. I've seen it done. I've tried it, and I—I don't like that you know. Rice, it's rice. Rice goes with the gumbo just like rice goes with the red beans. If I have a chef that makes a gumbo and he wants me to taste it and he brings it up to me without rice, I say, *I can't—I've got to have rice*. Even if he brings red beans up, I say *Well I can't taste it without rice*. Got to have rice, you know, so that's the way—that's the way I taste it. That's the way I was brought up: that you got to do the rice.

00:34:40

SR: Can you tell me if you—is there a difference in your mind between the definition of Creole food and soul food?

00:34:50

WB: Oh there's definitely a difference between Creole food and soul food, without a doubt. Creole food is soul food. It's the soul food of New Orleans. But to—there's a total difference between Creole cooking and soul food. Down home soul food cooking we don't do. We don't do chitterlings, okay. We don't do ox-tails. We don't do pig-tails, and we won't do those things. Those things are soul, down home Soul food, you know. We—all the things we do are New

Orleans Creole things. Like stuffed peppers, jambalaya, crawfish bisque, crawfish pies. So there's a distinct difference between what we do and what is strictly soul food.

00:35:47

SR: Is there—so maybe there's a difference between New Orleans soul food then and just Southern soul food. Is that right?

00:35:56

WB: That—that's exactly what I'm saying. New Orleans soul food is Creole food. I call our cooking Creole soul, because it's the soul food of New Orleans. Technically it's Creole food—it's Creole food. It's not soul food technically. And it's totally and completely different from regular soul food, as I just explained. I mean if you go into some markets that are in a suppressed neighborhood, you know what I'm saying, and they're selling to poor folks and you go into that market, you may have a 15-foot display of all of those things that are high cholesterol: pig-tail, pig-feet, everything on the pig, you understand, tripe and all that stuff. That—that's not Creole food. We don't—I've never eaten any of that. I've never—never even eaten any of that stuff. Never will.

00:37:07

SR: Okay. I—I have one more question for you, because we're running out of time. But if you could define gumbo in a couple sentences, what would your definition be of what gumbo is?

00:37:20

WB: Gumbo is the soup of New Orleans with soul in it.

00:37:31

SR: Thank you. That's a good note to end on. Thank you for your time. I really appreciate it.

00:37:35

WB: Let me know if you—.

00:37:37

[End Wayne Baquet Interview]