

Tia Moore-Henry
Café Dauphine – New Orleans, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen

Audio Engineer: Thomas Walsh

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Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Tuesday, May 26, 2015. I am at Café Dauphine in the Holy Cross section of the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. I'm here with audio engineer Thomas Walsh and one of the proprietors of Café Dauphine. Could I ask you to state your full name and tell me, in your words, what you do for a living?

[00:00:34]

Tia Moore Henry: My name is Tia Moore Henry. I am co-owner of Café Dauphine. This is a partnership with myself, Fred Henry, my husband, and his sister, Keisha Henry. We're located at 5229 Dauphine Street in the heart of the Lower Ninth Ward.

[00:00:49]

SR: Thank you. Can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

[00:00:55]

TMH: I was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana. That's about three hours from here, west of here. My husband and his family, they're from the Lower Ninth Ward. His grandmother's home is right across the street, his mom lives around the corner. So they are born and raised here in this neighborhood, and that's part of the reason why we decided to reinvest in this neighborhood, because my husband's connection, his love for his neighborhood.

[00:01:20]

SR: Wow. I didn't realize that you were from Lake Charles. How did you meet, and how long have you lived in New Orleans?

[00:01:27]

TMH: Oh, I've been here since '97. I went to school here. I graduated from Xavier University here, and when I was a senior in college I met my husband, and several years after

that we married. And we stayed here and we had two beautiful children, and I've been here ever since. *[Laughs]*

[00:01:44]

SR: Tell me what you went to school for.

[00:01:48]

TMH: I have a degree in biology/premed, so originally the goal was to go to dental school, but life just took different turns and I'm actually doing something now that I'm more passionate about. After I graduated from college I went back to school for nursing. I worked as a laboratory scientist as well, and while I was in school for nursing Hurricane Katrina hit. During that time I was nine months pregnant; I was still in school. I relocated back to Lake Charles [after Katrina] for four years, and during that time we purchased this facility and decided to open up this business. So, you know, life just kind of took a hook turn, *[Laughs]* went a different direction.

[00:02:30]

SR: What was your husband doing as an occupation before Katrina?

[00:02:34]

TMH: He was a compliance monitor for the New Orleans school board, and after the storm, I mean, you know, with the teachers, they were completely displaced and out of work forever. And then with the transition of the school system here, it was kind of impossible for him to go back to doing that, so while he was dislocated for the storm he started doing contracting work, and he's kind of been doing that ever since. He remodeled homes, he gutted homes; he did all the rebuilding here in the city. He did all the finish work here in the restaurant, so all the millwork and finish work that you see, he did it.

[00:03:10]

SR: So he didn't gain just one new profession after the storm.

[00:03:15]

TMH: Yes.

[00:03:16]

SR: [*Laughs*] He took on two different professions.

[00:03:19]

TMH: Yes, and then also he serves as the maintenance person here; he's the dishwasher here. So, yes, he wears many hats. [*Laughs*]

[00:03:26]

SR: And what about your sister-in-law? What was her work before Katrina?

[00:03:29]

TMH: She works in psychology, so she's a therapist. She still does that part-time as well. I usually work the day shift; she works the evening shift here in the restaurant.

[00:03:40]

SR: Tell me: I'd love to know a little bit about how you got here, Café Dauphine. Both, you know, the physical place, but also I'm sure you were searching around for what was going to happen next. But how did you come to the food service idea?

[00:03:57]

TMH: Well, prior to the— After the storm, actually, I started doing catering out of the home. I've always had a passion for cooking, so does my mom, and I learned a lot from her. But when this facility came available—. It was a corner store prior to the storm, and it had been a corner store since my husband was a kid, and they used to serve hot food and lunch meat and

groceries and things of that sort. It also had two apartments attached to the building as well. So it was an older couple that had been here a while, and they decided they did not want to come back and rebuild. I think it was just too much involved, and then not knowing what the future held for the neighborhood, they decided not to come back. But my husband's grandmother lived right across the street. Right before the storm we lived in another little property right next door to his grandmother's house in the same block. And the building was available for a really good price, and my husband knew that he could do a lot of the work himself, that we could save money doing. Originally we thought that it would be a coffee shop and we'd just do like po-boys and, you know, a really light menu. But just focus more on coffee. But I thought that the community would benefit more from a full-fledged restaurant because there's nothing else here to eat in the [area, not] even a drive-through McDonald's or anywhere. So, it was a lot of work and a lot of learning. We're still learning along the way because we never owned a restaurant before, we'd never worked in a restaurant before, so it was just a lot of learning and trial and error.

[00:05:31]

SR: That was a really brave decision [*Laughs*] to make, I think.

[00:05:34]

TMH: Well, it was a huge risk, and I don't think that we really even knew what we were getting ourselves into. Everybody was really excited about it because it took us four years from purchasing the building to getting it opened, just because we just were totally unknowledgeable about the profession and everything that was going to go into it. Then we hit a bump in the road with financing because we kind of ran out of money and we had to use a lot of money out of our own pocket to finish the work, just to get the building up and running so that we could start making some money.

[00:06:04]

SR: What year was that, that you actually opened?

[00:06:07]

TMH: We opened in 2012.

[00:06:09]

SR: Okay. So you bought it somewhere around, like, 2008?

[00:06:13]

TMH: 2009.

[00:06:15]

SR: 2009, okay.

[00:06:16]

TMH: 2009, yeah.

[00:06:17]

SR: Okay, so like three, four years after the storm.

[00:06:19]

TMH: Yeah, yeah.

[00:06:20]

SR: Well there's so much—. I have so many questions— [*Laughs*]

[00:06:23]

TMH: Okay.

[00:06:24]

SR: —out of what you just said. I guess my first question would be: Does your husband's grandmother live on Dauphine, or did he—?

[00:06:30]

TMH: Yeah, she lives on Dauphine.

[00:06:31]

SR: Dauphine? Okay.

[00:06:32]

TMH: Yeah, she lives on Dauphine.

[00:06:33]

SR: Cool.

[00:06:33]

TMH: Well, she's deceased. She passed after the storm, but two of his cousins still live in the home, and his sister lives in the home as well.

[00:06:40]

SR: That's so nice.

[00:06:41]

TMH: Yes. [*Laughs*]

[00:06:42]

SR: That you have family. Do you know what the name of the corner store was that was here?

[00:06:47]

TMH: The man's name was Bob, so anybody in the neighborhood that shopped here or anybody that knows—everybody called it “Bob's Store.” It was Bob's Store, [*Laughs*] Mr. Bob's Store.

[00:07:00]

SR: Does he still live in the neighborhood?

[00:07:02]

TMH: No. I don't think he—. He and his wife never lived in the neighborhood. Since we've opened he did come by one time to visit, to see how everything was. Then before the storm, my husband's cousin, she worked a long time in the restaurant for them. She used to do like the frying and the preparing of the food for them there, so she worked here like twenty years or something before the storm.

[00:07:25]

SR: Wow.

[00:07:25]

TMH: Yeah, but she's physically disabled and she's in a wheelchair. She was a little bit more mobile then than she is now, because she's kind of like totally in her wheelchair now, but she was with him for a long time.

[00:07:38]

SR: Did he serve po-boys?

[00:07:41]

TMH: Yes. He did po-boys. That was kind of like the staple hot food that he served. It was pretty much po-boys, French fries, and maybe like chicken nuggets and stuff like that. And then they used to like do sliced deli meat as well.

[00:07:55]

SR: Okay. Now what about—? You said that you did some catering. What do you mean by that? Like what kind of—? Did you cater events or did you do, like, suppers?

[00:08:09]

TMH: I did suppers. I did suppers, and I also did events, mostly for people that were close to me, for like small events, for like baby showers. One was for a concert. What else did we do? Family reunions, church functions. Stuff like that, on that scale, and you know [for] people that were close to me. And just, we got business based on referrals. It wasn't anything that I was really advertising, but as we got—because I was doing that prior to, okay, to even think about which direction Café Dauphine was going to be in. But I used it as a platform to kind of just get our name and the food out. And then we started doing suppers, myself and my sister-in-law, and that was another—you know, we could showcase our food and some of the things that were going to be prepared at the restaurant.

[00:08:58]

SR: Could you, for the record, for people who don't live in New Orleans and might be reading this or listening to this, could you describe what suppers are?

[00:09:05]

TMH: Suppers are meals that you cook in your home, but you sell them—. We usually do suppers like on a Friday. In New Orleans we usually do fried chicken, red beans and rice, jambalaya, catfish. And they're usually about ten dollars a plate, and you get usually your protein, macaroni and cheese or some kind of rice or vegetable, a bread, and a dessert. Where I'm from in Lake Charles we do suppers, too, but even Louisiana food differs from the east coast to the west coast. It is very different. But if you were to get a supper at home, it would probably either consist—most of the time it'll probably be barbecue. Either barbecue or fried fish. Even here, another thing that you'll get on a supper here is a stuffed bell pepper, the original stuffed bell pepper, that has the ground meat and the seafood and the breading, and it's baked.

[00:09:54]

SR: So you would get that in New Orleans but not in Lake Charles so much?

[00:09:56]

TMH: No, no.

[00:09:57]

SR: In Lake Charles, would it be the same price point?

[00:10:01]

TMH: Yes, it would be. It would be. It would still be—. Just depending, if it was just a simple—. Because, you know, a lot of times people do suppers as well for fundraisers for schools and things, or king and queen pageants and stuff like that. And the price, yeah, if it's just a small basic plate, maybe eight dollars—anywhere from eight to twelve dollars, depending on what you're getting.

[00:10:21]

SR: And when you were doing that with your sister-in-law, were you doing the suppers here or in Lake Charles?

[00:10:25]

TMH: No, that was—

[00:10:25]

SR: You were living—

[00:10:25]

TMH: —here. No, that—

[00:10:26]

SR: —here then?

[00:10:26]

TMH: —was here in New Orleans, yes.

[00:10:28]

SR: And how did you market that? Were people coming to your house, or did you deliver to—?

[00:10:33]

TMH: We delivered and from the home. We did a lot of workplace delivery. Sometimes we'd have maybe like twenty to fifty. Because I had some way in Avondale, and Avondale's a nice little drive there to the plants out there in Avondale. So sometimes we'd deliver like fifty plates just to that one site. Or just to different companies where they would order at least like an eight-plate minimum and then we would deliver. We would have walk-ins all day, so we would start cooking maybe early that morning for lunch, and then the suppers could run all the way till dinnertime, 7:00 that night.

[00:11:07]

SR: It's kind of like the original pop-up restaurant. Like in New Orleans there were—. That was one of the funnest things for me to discover when I first moved here, was the suppers.

[00:11:18]

TMH: *[Laughs]*

[00:11:18]

SR: Especially on Fridays.

[00:11:19]

TMH: And then you get to try different people's food, see how people cook here in New Orleans. It's something that's more homemade as compared to something that's processed, or from a restaurant, or out of the store. Yeah.

[00:11:31]

SR: Yeah, and I couldn't believe how good it was. I'm like, "I don't have to go to a restaurant to get fried fish."

[00:11:35]

TMH: Oh, no, uh-uh. Not here, *[Laughs]* especially on a Friday. *[Laughs]*

[00:11:38]

SR: And that was, I'm guessing, like a really good way to make a living while you were trying to start this up.

[00:11:47]

TMH: Not that we did it for a living, because we only did it maybe like once a month. Because I think that sometimes people get burnt out on suppers, and so many people here in New Orleans have suppers, so you just kind of have to get in the rotation, you know. *[Laughs]* We had those faithful people, just like the hair shops and the barbershops and things like that. They were pretty faithful. But it's nothing that we kind of did that we depended on it for income, because we did them maybe just once a month or once every other month. Because it was a lot of work, a lot of preparation, and then having to do something like that out of our home and depending—. We needed help: we needed delivery drivers, we needed people to help cook—and by people that I needed, I mean volunteers, not—. *[Laughs]*

[00:12:31]

SR: Right.

[00:12:32]

TMH: Not paid staff. So that wasn't something we were able to do consistently, you know, on a weekly basis.

[00:12:39]

SR: How would someone at the plant in Avondale find out about your supper?

[00:12:43]

TMH: It would be somebody that my husband, my sister-in-law, myself—that we knew. And then that person would just usually have a flyer and they would do the advertising for us. They would collect the money, they would get a sign-up sheet, you know, and take a list of what everybody wanted, what they didn't want. But usually whoever was at the workplace, they would be the designated person to take care of getting the orders for us, and of course they would usually get a free dinner. [Laughs]

[00:13:08]

SR: Right.

[00:13:09]

TMH: As an incentive, yeah.

[00:13:11]

SR: Commission.

[00:13:12]

TMH: Yes.

[00:13:13]

SR: So what came first, the idea to open a restaurant or finding the space and thinking, like—?

[00:13:18]

TMH: The space. The space came first because it was supposed to be a coffee shop. That was the idea of what we were going to do with the space, and that is why primarily it's an open

kitchen. Because had I known that this was going to be a restaurant, and if I would have known what I know now, the construction would have been totally different. But at the time—. We had to go through the historical district, because this is an historical district, so we had to go through them for all the construction that was done on the outside. All these windows, they weren't here when we purchased it. It was all closed in. But someone told us that the original building, like a hundred years ago, it was an ice cream parlor and it had open windows and they were able, I guess, to look over blueprints or something from the original building and see that, since those windows were there originally, that we can put them back in. But still things, like the awning. The awning could not be replaced. If it was, it has to be identical; that's still something that we have to do to the outside of it. And from the recessed lighting—every little detail. The signage, everything had to be submitted to the historical district for their approval.

[00:14:31]

As far as the inside is concerned, it was gutted when we bought it so we had to redo everything. We kept the apartment in the back. There was an additional apartment right here on the side but we used this and we turned this into a bar—we just did this actually a year ago. And we're using all the rest for storage. We were getting everything together for it to be a coffee shop, and I was like, you know what, in order for us to draw people from outside the neighborhood, which we're going to have to do in order to be able to sustain our business financially, we need to do something bigger that was going to attract people from outside the neighborhood. And it worked because most of our customers are actually not from the immediate Lower Ninth Ward. We have people that travel from all across the city, the surrounding city, the surrounding parishes, that come and patronize our restaurant. And it kind of took off right from the beginning. You know, I guess some businesses have to wait, and it's a growing process—

even though we're still growing—but I think we kind of hit the ground running as compared to what a lot of other restaurants have to go through here in the city. And then considering we're here in the Lower Ninth Ward, it's not like we're on the main street where you just happen to see us passing by. You have to be coming here specifically. We're in a part of the city that—. You don't even have to pass this part of the city at all because it's kind of on the end of the city, you know, next to another parish, and you have to cross that industrial canal. That's kind of a headache for some people. And there's not any shopping here. The only things that people come here for are: if you live here; you come and visit somebody you know; or, now, if you're just coming to see the area, to see what it's like since Katrina.

[00:16:11]

SR: Well, that was going to be one of my questions. Where is your—? I mean, you said your clientele—you answered that people come from all over the area, and I kind of got that feeling one time when I ate lunch here, but what—? I'm sure people come—they return because they like the food, but what do you think people, like first-timers, come for? Is it because they want to go somewhere in the Ninth Ward or—?

[00:16:42]

TMH: Most people that come here for the first time come here because they heard that this is the hidden gem of the Lower Ninth Ward and we have really, really great food. Most of our food—. Well, ninety percent of everything is prepared fresh. We make all of our sauces; we cook all of our meats. Everything is made from tender loving care. And we're very reasonably priced. I think that people enjoy their dining experience that they get when they come here. I think they like the atmosphere, and they like the experience of having to come to the Lower

Ninth Ward too, I think. I guess it's kind of nostalgic considering where it's come from and where it is now, in that we put something so beautiful here in this neighborhood.

[00:17:23]

SR: It's true, and I don't—. I can't say I ever really deeply explored the Lower Ninth Ward before Katrina, but I can't think of a white-tablecloth restaurant that was in this neighborhood before Katrina. Was there one?

[00:17:39]

TMH: No. I mean, there's really no restaurants here in the neighborhood. There's another soul food place here in the neighborhood, but that's it. I mean you're not even going to find a fast food place here. You're not going to find a grocery store here right now—not on this side of the canals. Not even a pharmacy. We have a few, like, fresh produce farmers markets that they do on the side of the road, but that's pretty much it. And if you want something to eat here in the city—if you live even in New Orleans East, if you're in the CBD, if you have to go in the French Quarter, you have to deal with going in heavily congested places. Parking is an issue. You still have to park on the street here, but you don't have to deal with the congestion, and it's just more relaxed here.

[00:18:23]

SR: What was, and has been, the reaction of your immediate neighborhood to having a restaurant here?

[00:18:29]

TMH: They're grateful that we put something here like this. They're very proud of it, because this is a place where people have—you know, they get together for special events, for graduations, to celebrate birthdays. This is a meeting place where a lot of our community leaders

and different nonprofit organizations in the neighborhood, where they can come and sit and meet and plan about the future of the neighborhood, and see familiar faces, and just rehash and see how we're going to move forward in the neighborhood. Most of my employees are all employed from the Lower Ninth Ward. My employees walk here, they ride their bikes, so we're giving back in that aspect as well.

[00:19:08]

SR: Yeah, seriously. Now, did it take much to convince your husband and your sister-in-law that you shouldn't do a coffee shop but you should do a sit-down sort of fine-dining restaurant?

[00:19:20]

TMH: No. But even the menu—everything probably evolved until the day the menus were printed, because we were always adding and taking away, and sampling this and sampling that, just because we had no background. I have a—. My head cook, his name is Shawn; he has a lot of restaurant experience. He's worked at a lot of restaurants and [with] a lot of top chefs here in the city, so he was very instrumental and very helpful and he's been an extreme blessing, even though he works another full-time job. So he works here full-time and there full-time, so he's usually here five to six days a week in the morning; then he goes to his other job in the evening. But he kind of helped me figure out about running the kitchen and the line, and prepping in advance. Because I didn't even know going in, like, how to prep accordingly for the day or what to anticipate. So it was a learning experience for me just to learn how to work the line, how to expedite the food, ordering, and everything. *[Laughs]*

[00:20:19]

SR: So he's been with you since the beginning?

[00:20:23]

TMH: Yes, yes. He's been with me from maybe six months before we opened, and he's always been available to me, whatever I need. If I call him up in the middle of the night and I need him, I just say, "Hey, look. I have this going on. I need you. I need you there before the sun rises in the morning." He's there. *[Laughs]*

[00:20:43]

SR: Can you tell us his last name?

[00:20:45]

TMH: His name is Shawn Smith.

[00:20:46]

SR: Smith, okay. Thanks. Well, it's good to have someone with a lot of experience when you're starting out somewhere new. Tell me a little bit about the process of developing your—. Well, maybe you can characterize your food for us. Just tell us what kind of food you have.

[00:21:03]

TMH: It's Creole-Cajun cuisine. So we've kept a lot of the traditional New Orleans favorites, because my sister-in-law, she's from New Orleans. And I'm from Lake Charles, Louisiana, like I said. My cooking style is more geared to the Creole way, the Cajun way, and it's a little different maybe from some of the things that—. For instance, like the way that they cook gumbo here. The way that we prepare gumbo is a little different, but people love the gumbo, so some things are a little different. So it's a good combination of, I guess, just to give you a little taste of Louisiana in general and not just New Orleans.

[00:21:39]

SR: Well, since you mention the gumbo, can you tell us what it's like and what influences are most prominent—the Lake Charles side of the family or the New Orleans side of the family? What kind of gumbo do you serve?

[00:21:55]

TMH: I fix a dark-roux gumbo. It's non-filé. It has—and filé is a powder that you use to thicken and give your gumbo a flavor, but I don't use that. I slow-cook a flour and oil roux for half the day [*Laughs*] until it's almost scorched. And then the gumbo cooks with the flavoring, and all the meat and vegetable, and all of the good stuff that we put into it to make it what it is. It's a process that takes half the day to cook it once you put everything together, too.

[00:22:29]

SR: So you have the roux on the stovetop and you—?

[00:22:31]

TMH: On the stovetop. I usually do that the day before I actually have to cook the gumbo, because just the process of cooking the roux can take maybe five hours.

[00:22:40]

SR: Really?

[00:22:41]

TMH: Yeah.

[00:22:41]

SR: So I'm guessing you don't just stand there the whole time and stir it.

[00:22:45]

TMH: You have to watch it. You have to cook it on a very low fire or it will scorch at the bottom, and you don't want it to get scorched and get those little pieces of black, crispy,

burnt whatever it is, in it, so you have to cook it on a low fire. So that's why the process takes so long. And you do have to watch it and stir it constantly so that it cooks evenly.

[00:23:05]

SR: That is a really long roux.

[00:23:09]

TMH: Yeah, yeah.

[00:23:10]

SR: What color does it get?

[00:23:11]

TMH: Chocolate brown. It has to be chocolate. I always tell my cooks, whenever they're fixing it, like it needs to be almost burnt. Right before it burns, that's whenever you stop cooking it—right before it burns. *[Laughs]*

[00:23:22]

SR: So not milk chocolate; dark chocolate.

[00:23:24]

TMH: Dark chocolate, yes. Dark chocolate, pretty dark.

[00:23:26]

SR: And is that how you grew up eating and cooking gumbo in Lake Charles?

[00:23:31]

TMH: Yes, that is, because, you know, here you get all kind of—. You get filé gumbo, you get tomato paste gumbo; the thickness and the thinness always differs.

[00:23:39]

SR: So tell me what else yours has in it. It's a meat and seafood gumbo, or just a meat gumbo?

[00:23:43]

TMH: We do a chicken, sausage, and shrimp gumbo that's usually on the menu daily. That's usually what we serve for our soup of the day.

[00:23:51]

SR: Okay, and what kind of sausage?

[00:23:53]

TMH: We use a pork and beef sausage.

[00:23:56]

SR: Smoked or fresh?

[00:23:58]

TMH: Smoked.

[00:23:59]

SR: Okay. [*Laughs*]

[00:24:00]

TMH: [*Laughs*]

[00:24:01]

SR: In Lake Charles, would you have put shrimp in it?

[00:24:04]

TMH: Yeah. You know, but what you put in it kind of differs. You can put crab in it, you can put okra in it, but we just try to keep something a little general that can apply to a more wide range of people since we only do that one type of gumbo.

[00:24:19]

SR: Okay. I'm going to have to try that next time. So, you knew you were going to have gumbo on the menu.

[00:24:29]

TMH: Uh huh.

[00:24:30]

SR: What else did you know you were going to have on the menu?

[00:24:33]

TMH: We knew we were going to have pastas, we knew we were going to have all things seafood—fried and grilled. We have catfish. We have redfish as well. We do a redfish Florentine: the redfish is grilled, and it has a crawfish spinach sauce to go with it. Of course shrimp. We have jumbo tail shrimp that we sell with our platters, and then we have a different size shrimp that we use for our po-boys—the smaller ones. We have oysters, and we do stuffed shrimp and crab cakes. We do ribs, barbecue ribs. We also do steaks. So the menu just kind of—. We just kind of go one-stop shop: anything that anybody wants in the family, you should be able to find here. And we do burgers as well. We do salads. And—I think I didn't leave out anything.

[Laughs]

[00:25:15]

SR: Well you do po-boys, too. Did you always know that you would have po-boys on the menu?

[00:25:22]

TMH: You know, po-boys are a staple in New Orleans, because if you're [in a group] of people somebody's going to want a po-boy. If you're going out to eat anywhere in New Orleans,

you're going to expect to see po-boys. It would just kind of be weird to go to a Creole-Cajun seafood restaurant in New Orleans and not see po-boys on the menu.

[00:25:43]

SR: Are po-boys on your lunch and your dinner menu?

[00:25:45]

TMH: Yeah, we serve po-boys all day, every day.

[00:25:47]

SR: You know, I don't know if you have an answer to this, but when—. I'm really happy to be interviewing you for a lot of different reasons, but one of them is that this place represents a lot of white-tablecloth restaurants that serve, you know, some higher end, well-thought-out, multiple-ingredient—you know, fancier—dishes, but they also serve po-boys. I mean, there are lots of fine dining restaurants like that.

[00:26:18]

TMH: Yeah, here in the city, yeah.

[00:26:19]

SR: Yeah.

[00:26:19]

TMH: It's a staple. You have to have it. You have to have it. Just like you have to have, you know, cold drinks, sodas, on your menu. You got to have a po-boy on your menu. You're going to disappoint your patrons if you don't. *[Laughs]*

[00:26:30]

SR: What do you think it is about po-boys that that's true?

[00:26:34]

TMH: I like sandwiches. I like sandwiches. So if you are a sandwich person or a bread person, which I think a lot of people in the South are, you know, it's just a combination of all those good things put together. I think it's a good lunch item, too. People like to eat po-boys on—. You know, even here in New Orleans, if you go to a gas station, a lot of gas stations even serve po-boys. It's our own little brand of fast food, kind of, I think. *[Laughs]*

[00:27:02]

SR: Mm hmm. In Lake Charles is it that way?

[00:27:05]

TMH: No.

[00:27:06]

SR: Would you have a fine-dining restaurant with po-boys?

[00:27:08]

TMH: No. There are even bakeries here in New Orleans that make their own French bread. And we use Leidenheimer's, so our bread is fresh and delivered daily. There aren't any French bread companies there, so if there was a restaurant that served it they would probably have to get something that was frozen or something like that. It wouldn't be something that would fresh-made from a bakery.

[00:27:31]

SR: Right. Tell me what po-boys you serve.

[00:27:36]

TMH: We have a fried oyster po-boy, we have a shrimp po-boy that's either fried or grilled, we have a beef short rib po-boy. That's our version of the roast beef po-boy, which is really popular here in New Orleans, but the beef short rib is just a higher quality of meat that we

use that's just—in my opinion, just a little bit more tastier. We also have a hot sausage po-boy. We use a popular brand of hot sausage patties, Patton's, and that's a local brand as well. You have to have that on your menu, too, here in New Orleans. *[Laughs]* Like I said, our bread is from Leidenheimer and it's fresh daily. We butter and toast our buns and they're dressed with lettuce, tomatoes, and mayo.

[00:28:19]

SR: So, I know what kind of bread you use. What kind of mayo do you use?

[00:28:22]

TMH: We use Blue Plate, which is also a New Orleans.

[00:28:25]

SR: Yeah. So I had that roast beef po-boy last week, and it was amazing. I have to say, I don't think I've had any kind of sandwich—definitely not a po-boy—that was short rib.

[00:28:43]

TMH: Yeah.

[00:28:44]

SR: Can you—? I'm trying to picture. So, do you get the short ribs with the bone in them?

[00:28:50]

TMH: No, it's not—. It's a roast. It's a roast.

[00:28:53]

SR: Oh. I don't even know what that looks like. So it's a—. Oh, like a rib roast.

[00:28:56]

TMH: Yes.

[00:28:57]

SR: Okay. And can you tell me a little bit about how you cook that? Without, you know, revealing any deep, dark secrets?

[00:29:03]

TMH: It's baked for a long period of time, in its own gravy. We also make an additional brown gravy with garlic that we top it off with in the end. It's cooked at a low temperature for a long period of time, which makes it really tender and lets all of those flavors and seasonings marinate into that meat and give it that good flavor that it has.

[00:29:30]

SR: One thing that I liked was that—. I mean I like all kinds of roast beef po-boys, but I liked how yours, it was so tender that if you went at it with a fork it would fall apart, but there were still like individual slices of meat.

[00:29:45]

TMH: Yeah, we slice the roast and pre-portion it for the individual servings, yeah.

[00:29:51]

SR: And then my server suggested that I get mine with onions and peppers on top.

[00:29:58]

TMH: *[Laughs]* I guess that's because that's the way we like to eat it, and we think it tastes great. We don't serve it normally that way, but that's just a little extra oomph. You know, if you want a roast beef po-boy, that would be a recommendation that you get that extra because it really goes nicely together.

[00:30:13]

SR: I like that a lot. Do people get the onions and peppers on different po-boys, or just the roast beef one?

[00:30:20]

TMH: Just that one. Just that one primarily, because a lot of the other ones are fried, you know. So, I don't know—that's just—. It doesn't go as well. You don't have that gravy; it doesn't complement it [as well.] But the grilled shrimp po-boy, they may get some sautéed onions and bell peppers on the grilled shrimp po-boy. That's how I get mine. *[Laughs]*

[00:30:40]

SR: I like that. And it was red peppers on mine, I believe.

[00:30:43]

TMH: It's a mixture of yellow onion, red onion, and bell peppers, fresh jalapeno peppers, and then the mini sweet peppers. And the mini sweet peppers come in green, red, and orange. So it's a mixture of all of those onions and bell peppers together.

[00:30:59]

SR: And then another touch that I appreciated was that I got mine dressed. Do you eat your roast beef po-boy dressed?

[00:31:10]

TMH: Yes. I like everything that could possibly come on it, with the exception of pickles. I want it all. I want heavy mayonnaise, I want lettuce, I want tomatoes, I want all the vegetables on it. Yeah, I want everything on it. *[Laughs]*

[00:31:22]

SR: And it came dressed, like, on the bottom of the sandwich, which was unusual. You didn't put the lettuce and tomato on top. I guess it was an open-face sandwich.

[00:31:32]

TMH: Yeah, it's an open-face sandwich, yeah. Yeah, so it's kind of—

[00:31:34]]

SR: I guess that's why.

[00:31:35]

TMH: Everything's kind of on the side and the meat is in the middle, [*Laughs*] so.

[00:31:38]

SR: Are your other po-boys open-face like that—

[00:31:41]

TMH: Yeah,—

[00:31:41]

SR: —or is it just that one?

[00:31:42]

TMH: —they all are. They all are, because for presentation and serving—you know, to serve it so that it just looks better with everything open and kind of looking at you.

[00:31:50]

SR: Yeah, it is more of a—I don't know. Yeah, service-friendly.

[00:31:56]

TMH: Yeah, and then, you know, our po-boys come twelve inches. We cut them in half, and it's pretty hard—you can maybe eat one half, but by the second half you're kind of just eating the meat and everything out of the middle. You're just kind of like, “Okay, I'm kind of full but I still want to eat the rest of my shrimp,” or the rest of my beef. So you just kind of eat the rest of it off of the fork. [*Laughs*]

[00:32:15]

SR: I was telling Thomas, the audio engineer, that that sandwich kind of kicked my butt for the rest of the day, but it was worth it.

[00:32:23]

TMH: Oh, yeah. It's naptime when you're done. *[Laughs]*

[00:32:25]

SR: Yeah. *[Laughs]* What about your seafood for your seafood po-boys? Is that Gulf seafood? Or where do you get your seafood?

[00:32:35]

TMH: Yes, we get it from a local company. Actually in Kenner, but everything is Gulf shrimp; the oysters are local. Everything is fresh and Louisiana-grown.

[00:32:46]

SR: How many po-boys would you say you sell? What percentage of sales, I guess, would be a more interesting way to ask that?

[00:32:55]

TMH: You know, I don't really know the concrete number percentage-wise for the po-boys. I would say maybe ten percent, because we have such a wide range of food that we serve. And seafood dominates the menu, period. But maybe about ten percent of the sales, maybe.

[00:33:15]

SR: Can you tell when someone walks in—?

[00:33:17]

TMH: Well, just on a daily basis we may sell, let's say, maybe about eighteen po-boys a day.

[00:33:23]

SR: Can you tell when somebody walks in: that's going to be a po-boy—?

[00:33:27]

TMH: I never can tell. Usually—. Well, let me take that back. We have a lot of volunteers that come into the neighborhood that are doing things in the Lower Ninth Ward to help rebuild. We get a lot of tour groups that come, a lot of colleges. If it's a group of high school kids or college kids, I know that I'm going to probably sell all of my po-boy bread that day. Because if I have fifty college students, forty of them are probably going to get po-boys. So that demographic, college and high school kids, they are—. I already know. When I see them walking down the street, I'm like, "Okay, y'all. Get the bread out." [*Laughs*] They're going to all get po-boys, definitely. Usually the shrimp, catfish, a few hot sausage.

[00:34:16]

SR: I think it would be so interesting and gratifying to have all these different kinds of people coming in here. You know, like the locals that drive from across the city but also the people who come to rebuild the city.

[00:34:33]

TMH: Oh, yeah. We've met so—. I've met so many people from around the country, from abroad, that are visiting here. And it just delights me so to know that someone that's visiting from Holland or somewhere decided that while they were in the United States, when they were in New Orleans, that they were going to come to Café Dauphine. They'll say, "Well, I saw it on Yelp," or, "While I was in the French Quarter somebody at the hotel told me about it." So to just be here three years and to get that kind of recognition and feedback, it's rewarding.

[00:35:04]

SR: Yeah. The HBO series, *Treme*—did that film here? Somebody told me it did.

[00:35:13]

TMH: At this restaurant?

[00:35:14]

SR: Yeah.

[00:35:14]

TMH: No. No, it didn't.

[00:35:15]

SR: Oh, okay.

[00:35:16]

TMH: Wendell Pierce, he's been here once. He's been here once but, no, not during filming. [*Laughs*]

[00:35:20]

SR: Okay. I'm not even sure you opened before they were finished filming, but someone said that they did.

[00:35:24]

TMH: No, uh-uh.

[00:35:25]

SR: So, I'd love to know about how you learned to cook. Like, who your cooking inspiration was and what cooking was like in your household.

[00:35:36]

TMH: My mom and my grandmother. My grandmother, she cooked every day. When we came home from school we had a hot meal every day. I never ate McDonald's or fast food. My

grandmother would make gumbo, red beans and rice, spaghetti, tripe, chitterlings, cow tongue, collard greens. My grandmother, I guess, you know, she—. My grandmother just passed a few years ago. She was ninety-three, so she'd been around a long time. She grew up the old-time country way, so we had a hot meal every day. Whenever I went home, my mom, when she got off from work, she cooked dinner for us. That was another hot meal. Whenever I was ten years old I started preparing meals for the house. My mom taught me how to cook when I was really, really young. So whenever I was ten years old I was fixing chicken and rice and gravy and spaghetti, the whole layout. The vegetable and everything for the family. It was just four of us, just me and my mom and my dad, and I had a younger brother that's two years younger than me.

[00:36:37]

But my mom loves to cook, she loves to bake, and she's always experimenting with new things, and I think I got that from her. She still calls me with ideas and we still feed off of each other. One of our signature dishes, the deep-fried stuffed bell pepper, that was an inspiration from my mother. Because she didn't really like the original stuffed bell pepper the way that it's prepared here in New Orleans. And me and her kind of got together and she was like, "Well, how else can we—? What else can we do with this thing?" We started doing this whenever we were doing the suppers. It's more of a seafood stuffing, without the ground meat. So it's crab and it's shrimp and it's a breading, and it's all inside the bell pepper, and the whole bell pepper is battered and deep-fried.

[00:37:19]

SR: And, for the record, can you tell us what a more traditional New Orleans-style stuffed bell pepper is like?

[00:37:26]

TMH: It's baked and it has shrimp, crabmeat, ground meat in a breading, and it's topped off with a little breadcrumbs and it's baked to a golden brown—and the bell pepper's exposed with all the stuffing on the inside. Some places you will get them, they may do like a tomato sauce or something like that, but we don't do ours that way here.

[00:37:48]

SR: So you have both of those—

[00:37:49]

TMH: Yeah, we have both—

[00:37:50]

SR: —on the menu.

[00:37:50]

TMH: —of those on the menu, yes.

[00:37:51]

SR: I'm not sure I've seen another restaurant in New Orleans that had two different kinds of stuffed peppers. [*Laughs*]

[00:37:56]

TMH: [*Laughs*] Well, here at Café Dauphine—. Look, I'll tell you, the menu goes on and on. It's always something to try different.

[00:38:03]

SR: Did you grow up in Lake Charles eating any kind of stuffed bell pepper?

[00:38:07]

TMH: We do a stuffed bell pepper that has more of—. They call it “dirty rice” here; at home we call it “rice dressing.” So with more of a rice dressing mixture inside; not with the

tomato sauce or with the gravy and anything like that, but like a rice dressing mixture. We'll fix that maybe on the holidays and stuff like that.

[00:38:24]

SR: Right. When you were ten and you started cooking for the family, was that by choice? I mean—.

[00:38:30]

[Brief interruption; transcript suspended]

[00:40:05]

SR: When you started cooking for the family, were you happy about that?

[00:40:09]

TMH: Oh, yeah. It's something that I wanted to do, because I was probably already kind of helping my mom along the way, and if she was cooking I was always there assisting. So by ten I was just, you know, prepared and ready to start doing it on my own.

[00:40:23]

SR: Do you remember the first thing you cooked for the family?

[00:40:26]

TMH: I kind of started, when I first—. I think it was a Hamburger Helper. I don't know what kind it was, but it was a Hamburger Helper type of meal. *[Laughs]*

[00:40:34]

SR: So you have a daughter who's about that age now. Is she interested in cooking?

[00:40:39]

TMH: Oh, yes, yes. Whenever I'm cooking it's, "Mama, let me do it. Let me do the whole thing." I'm like—. She wants to cut up the seasonings; she wants to do it all. Last night

she made a pan of brownies and she wanted to make it all on her own. She wanted to measure everything by herself. So she likes being in the kitchen as well, and so does my son. He likes it as well. So we cook together. We decorate cakes together.

[00:41:03]

SR: Sweet.

[00:41:05]

TMH: Yeah, they have a blast in the kitchen.

[00:41:07]

SR: And they come in here after school, huh? That's kind of nice.

[00:41:10]

TMH: Some days, yeah, some days. They're not ready yet, my daughter, to be a hostess or to—because they're still kind of all over the place. But hopefully in the next few years she'll be able to put on [*Laughs*] her uniform and greet the guests.

[00:41:23]

SR: Put them to work. I can see that.

[00:41:25]

TMH: Mm hmm.

[00:41:26]

SR: So, what is your heritage? You said earlier—I think you referred to yourself as Creole. Are you Creole?

[00:41:35]

TMH: Yes, I am. That's kind of a touchy area here in New Orleans, but my father's mom, she's half black, half white. On my mother's side, my grandmother is Indian and black,

and a little Caucasian down the line. So it's just a mixture of a whole lot of—. I guess I'm gumbo too. *[Laughs]* Just a whole lot of things.

[00:42:05]

SR: What did you mean when you said that's sort of tricky in New Orleans?

[00:42:10]

TMH: It's—. *[Pauses]* That's a whole—.

[00:42:16]

SR: *[Laughs]* I know it is.

[00:42:17]

TMH: That's a whole other interview. That's a whole other interview. *[Laughs]*

[00:42:19]

SR: I know.

[00:42:19]

TMH: That's another interview. *[Laughs]*

[00:42:20]

SR: I'm just—. I guess—

[00:42:21]

TMH: Another topic.

[00:42:22]

SR: —what I'm wondering is—. Well, is your husband's family Creole?

[00:42:28]

TMH: I've never heard them refer to themselves as being that way. Not that I—. You know, I'm black, I'm African American, but in Louisiana that's what will make you Creole. My

grandmother was *passé blanc*, which is, you know, she passed for white. So, like I said, in Louisiana the way that people refer to themselves or how they identify themselves is a little different even, you know, just when you're not even that far away.

[00:43:05]

SR: Right. And then Creole cooking is something different. I guess when it comes to cooking, it seems like you're the main person of your business partners in the kitchen.

[00:43:19]

TMH: Yes.

[00:43:19]

SR: Is that right?

[00:43:20]

TMH: Yes.

[00:43:20]

SR: What is your division of labor here? So, you're in the kitchen, and your husband does a lot of the—

[00:43:25]

TMH: Maintenance and keeping up with the building. And he's the dishwasher. He and his sister also do the bookkeeping together. That's not my forte. I would rather not have anything to do with that. I would rather not even write a check. I don't even want to see a bill. That's just not—. [*Laughs*] That's just not my forte. I'd rather just kind of be hands-on with the day-to-day business aspects as far as the kitchen and what you visually see.

[00:43:52]

SR: Okay, and so your sister-in-law does the books. So you don't have to—

[00:43:57]

TMH: She works the night shift, so she manages and works the kitchen during the evening time.

[00:44:01]

SR: Oh, okay. Do you ever disagree about seasonings or—?

[00:44:08]

TMH: Oh—. Not too much, not too much. Because, you know, the menu is already in place. Every now and then we'll introduce something new or do a special, but those decisions were already made beforehand, and it's already concrete. This is what it is. She has a few dishes that she prepares; she's the only one that prepares those dishes. I have things that I only do, just to kind of split up the workload.

[00:44:36]

SR: What are her dishes?

[00:44:37]

TMH: She does the original bell pepper, and she does the Lizardi Rolls, which is our Cajun-Asian eggroll. It's one of the appetizers on the menu.

[00:44:44]

SR: I wanted to ask you about that, because I haven't tried that yet, but I know from your website and other materials that that's one of your signatures. Can you describe that?

[00:44:52]

TMH: Yes, that's a favorite here by our customers. It's a Cajun-Asian eggroll. It's in a traditional eggroll wrapper, but it has cabbage, shrimp, crawfish, and crab in the filling and it has Cajun as well as Asian spices. It's topped off with a spicy, sweet-heat chili sauce.

[00:45:15]

SR: How did you come up with that?

[00:45:17]

TMH: Just all things that we knew went together well. And just—you know, just experimentation, like, “This is kind of good. This is kind of good. Okay, now that’s it.” *[Laughs]*

[00:45:25]

SR: But how did you even come up with the concept?

[00:45:28]

TMH: We were trying to develop an appetizer that we wanted to roll with for the restaurant, and we discovered this during the times that we were doing the suppers. So that was one of the dishes that we ran on the suppers, just to see how people liked it, even though some of the ingredients and the quality changed once we opened up the restaurant because we started getting something from some different vendors, like as far as the wrappers are concerned. We weren’t using the supermarket brand anymore; we have some more high-quality commercial ones that we use now. But it was just a thought that Keisha, the co-owner, my sister-in-law, came up with. Things that she thought that would go good together, that would go with the eggroll. And it probably started out maybe with different spices and just tweaked it and tweaked it along the way. But we put crawfish, crab, and shrimp in it, so it’s a lot of good stuff in there. *[Laughs]*

[00:46:19]

SR: Did people like the eggrolls as a supper?

[00:46:22]

TMH: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. That’s how we knew that that was going to be a winner for the menu, and it’s very popular.

[00:46:29]

SR: What are your top three most popular dishes, besides the po-boys?

[00:46:35]

TMH: The Lizardi Rolls, which are the Cajun-Asian eggrolls. Usually if you come here, and you get an appetizer, that's going to be your go-to thing. People love the gumbo. If they're going to have a starter, a lot of times they're going to get the gumbo as well. The pastas are really good. People love getting the pastas here as well. The redfish Florentine, that's one of our signature dishes, which is the real redfish with the crawfish spinach topping on it. And the Creole pepper shrimp. That's really good as well, and that's the garlic-mashed potatoes, and it's a gravy that has onions and bell peppers and jalapenos and sweet bell peppers in it. And the shrimp, and we use the jumbo shrimp. This is a picture of right here. But that's really good as well, and it has French bread on the side for dipping. That's our version of barbecue shrimp, actually, but it's kind of less messy because you don't have to go through the headache of peeling shrimp. That evolved from the barbecue shrimp that was on our menu, because we did start out with just like a normal, traditional, New Orleans-style barbecue shrimp where the shrimp were in the shell with the head and everything, with the gravy. This evolved from that. *[Laughs]*

[00:47:44]

SR: People didn't really want to peel the shrimp at the table?

[00:47:48]

TMH: Not that, because if you order barbecue shrimp you already know to expect that. So when we came up with this dish, it was like, you know, well this is a little bit better than the barbecue shrimp. So we just kind of got rid of that and stuck with this one, and it's one of our signature dishes. It's a signature dish for us, so it was something different that we have on our

menu as compared to a lot of places that just have the barbecue shrimp on their menu.

[00:48:12]

SR: What is your most popular po-boy?

[00:48:15]

TMH: Shrimp, of course. It's the shrimp po-boy. Sometimes people get the half-and-half po-boy, which is half oyster and half shrimp. But definitely the shrimp po-boy.

[00:48:25]

SR: When it's half and-half, is it like one side is shrimp and one is oyster—

[00:48:28]

TMH: Yeah, yeah.

[00:48:28]

SR: —or they're together? Okay.

[00:48:29]

TMH: Yeah, usually one half is oyster and one half is shrimp.

[00:48:31]

SR: That's pretty much been across the board at every interview in this project: the shrimp is the most popular po-boy.

[00:48:38]

TMH: And then even, you know, a lot of times, like I tell you, when the college kids come and the high school kids, they want a po-boy because people think if they come to New Orleans they have to get a po-boy. Before they leave New Orleans, that's one of the things you have to get, is a po-boy. So shrimp is kind of the go-to, win-win, never-fail [*Laughs*] po-boy to try.

[00:48:55]

SR: Are you still seeing a lot of volunteer groups in this neighborhood?

[00:48:59]

TMH: Not as many, but they're still here. And then during spring break it's group after group—usually, during spring break. And now that it's summertime and they're out of school, we'll be seeing a lot of volunteers now, too.

[00:49:15]

SR: Now are they building houses at this point, mostly, or what are they doing?

[00:49:19]

TMH: Remodeling and just doing—. People that are already in their homes—doing repairs, painting, doing roofing stuff. You know, because none of these volunteers have experience, so maybe repairing a fence, cleaning out the yards, cutting trees back, that type of work.

[00:49:38]

SR: Can you talk a little bit, for the record, about this neighborhood and what happened in the Holy Cross area after Katrina? It wasn't—. Unlike a few blocks from here where, you know, a lot of houses were just swept off of their foundations, it seems like blocks are pretty solid here.

[00:50:00]

TMH: Oh, no, no. We had like eleven feet of water in this building, but—. The Industrial Canal right here is only three blocks from where we are right here, but the breach wasn't here. The breach was on the Claiborne [Avenue] side, so they got the impact and the brunt of that water force coming in and kind of just obliterating everything that was in its path right there. But

on this side, everything just kind of filled up with water, and it was like eleven feet of water here in this building right here. So the neighborhood right here was under water, but it just did not get the impact in this area. So everything was—. Yeah, everything was still standing on this side of the Industrial Canal.

[00:50:46]

SR: It looks like a really large percentage of the population over here is back.

[00:50:55]

TMH: Yeah, but a lot of my neighbors are not original neighbors. It's a lot of new people that moved into the neighborhood. The demographic has changed greatly in the area following the storm. The property taxes and everything has kind of increased, because I think that this neighborhood is kind of moving in a different direction from where it was ten years ago. I think a lot of people that are, you know, moving into the city find that this is a really quiet and relaxed little area. It's in walking distance from the levee; you can always go walk up there. It's a beautiful view, the same view that you would get on the Riverwalk just a few miles up. It's still close to the city without having to travel through all the traffic to get to. You know, because it's a straight shot from here into the French Quarter and downtown without having to get on the interstate and having to go through all the traffic.

[00:51:47]

SR: It's true. So, a lot of the newer neighbors that you have, do you feel like—? I mean, of course this is a generalization, but are they mostly people who lived in New Orleans before or totally new to the city?

[00:52:03]

TMH: It's a mixture, it's a mixture. Because my neighbor that has this blue house right here on the corner, that's her summer home. She lives in Puerto Rico. So she's back and forth here. Maybe, you know, I'll see her—like every three months I'll see her. My neighbors here, they're from out of state. They bought this house next door. So it's a mixture of people from outside the New Orleans area and people that are just from around everywhere now.

[00:52:30]

SR: How long has your husband's family been in this neighborhood?

[00:52:33]

TMH: About sixty years. Yes, because his grandfather purchased that house maybe about that long ago.

[00:52:41]

SR: Okay. And they did decide to come back to the neighborhood.

[00:52:45]

TMH: Yeah, because his grandmother owned her house and she had insurance so she was able to rebuild. She didn't make it back into her home because she passed while she was still dislocated. So she wasn't able to see her home finished, but her son moved into the house. She had another property that was next door that me and my husband used to live in, too, before the storm, and her son moved there. And then her niece and her sister and my sister-in-law moved into the family house, the grandmother's house.

[00:53:16]

SR: Okay. So you did live in this neighborhood right before the storm.

[00:53:19]

TMH: Yeah, just two years. Two years I lived here.

[00:53:22]

SR: What neighborhood do you live in now? Do you still live here?

[00:53:25]

TMH: I live in New Orleans East, about fifteen minutes from here.

[00:53:27]

SR: Okay, not too bad of a commute.

[00:53:29]

TMH: No, not at all, because there's no traffic. So as long as I don't have any traffic, then—. [*Laughs*]

[00:53:35]

SR: Did you have any reservations about opening a business in this neighborhood?

[00:53:42]

TMH: It was a big risk because after the storm, and knowing what we knew about the neighborhood before, this would be kind of an economically oppressed neighborhood. And going into it with the menu that we had and the prices that we had, we just didn't—. That was kind of sketchy. We wanted to know that that was something that was going to be able to appeal to our immediate neighbors—or, you know, something they were going to be able to afford maybe once a month to be able to come out and eat here. We depend on outside of the neighborhood to really sustain us and keep us open; not for the immediate neighborhood.

[00:54:21]

SR: Well, how do you feel—? I mean, it was a big risk then. How do you feel now?

[00:54:26]

TMH: It's still a struggle. It's still a fight. We know that we still have to maintain a certain quality of food to keep our customers coming back, to make sure that we always have positive referrals, to make sure that everybody has a great dining experience so they will tell somebody else about it and come back. So we haven't arrived yet where we're just, you know, we're just skating. We still have to push; we still have to market and advertise ourselves to let other people in other places know that we're here and that we have great food. We do a lot of online advertising through Yelp and Urbanspoon and websites like that, so when people are looking for somewhere to go and eat we'll pop up and they'll be able to see pictures of the food, they're able to see other people's reviews, and know that it's okay to come and eat here while they're in town. We also did Groupon and we sold like 800 Groupons, and that was to people from New Orleans and also outside of New Orleans, so that gave us a lot of exposure and that was a good marketing tool as well.

[00:55:30]

SR: How are you feeling at this point about your career shift?

[00:55:38]

TMH: It's time-consuming; it's stressful; it takes a lot out of me. I don't have much of an outside life because I know that I have to be here every day. And sometimes it takes away from our family time as well, because if I'm not here my husband has to be here. But I'm actually doing something that I love. It's not like coming to work every day; it's kind of like coming to my home away from home. I'm very passionate about food and it's very rewarding. I think that this is what I was meant to do. I hope that, twenty years from now, that we're still around and that I'm somehow maybe like a legend in New Orleans, just like Leah Chase or somebody. But I

love what I do and I love what God has allowed me to do here, and I think that is a huge blessing.

[00:56:26]

SR: It's interesting you mention Leah Chase because she took a chance on a neighborhood too and is still—. You know, it's going strong, and your story sort of reminds me of that a little bit.

[00:56:41]

TMH: Yeah, I hope that it's the story—

[00:56:42]

SR: And your cooking's really good. [*Laughs*]

[00:56:43]

TMH: —that people tell years from now. [*Laughs*] Yeah, and she actually came when we first opened.

[00:56:48]

SR: Oh, yeah?

[00:56:48]

TMH: She read about us in *The Times-Picayune*, and she did grace us with her presence, she and her daughter, yes.

[00:56:53]

SR: That would be a good day. What do you find—? Well, I don't want to put words in your mouth. What is the most rewarding part of your job? Is it the cooking? Is it owning your own business? Or the people you meet? Or what's the most rewarding part?

[00:57:11]

TMH: The most rewarding part, I think, is knowing that I'm able to do something that—. Nothing brings more happiness to people like a good plate of food, and just knowing that people are eating and enjoying your food: that's a great feeling. That's a great feeling. My mom is the same way. Any time she cooks—and I think I get that from her—she's like, "How is it?" She's always kind of nervous, you know, how everybody's going to—. Every day I'm still nervous about how a new person is going to feel about the food, and then it's always kind of like a sigh of relief at the end when they're just like, "Ah, that was so good." And people, they come in town and they go eat at different places in the French Quarter and they'll tell me, "This is some of the best food I've had since I've been here." And that's really rewarding, and knowing that, okay, I must be doing something right. Because the competition is very steep in New Orleans, you know. It's stiff competition because we are known for our food, and for people to say that it's some of the best food that they've had since they've been here, that's pretty incredible.

[00:58:13]

SR: What do you miss from home?

[00:58:16]

TMH: I like the country, laid back, not so much the fast pace. Being able to just go on the lake and go fishing, you know, and it's more of just a family-oriented place. You go to church on Sundays, you have Sunday dinner together. The environment is different. It's a lot cleaner and neater. The homes look a little bit better. *[Laughs]* It's just a little different than New Orleans; it's not as rustic as New Orleans. It doesn't have the historical charm. *[Laughs]*

[00:58:52]

SR: *[Laughs]* Right. Yeah, it's funny that you're saying the country isn't as rustic as the city, but I totally know what you mean.

[00:59:01]

TMH: You know what I—. Yeah. [*Laughs*]

[00:59:02]

SR: What about to eat? Do you miss anything from home?

[00:59:05]

TMH: You know, if I was at home, I wouldn't eat—. I'm here all day, I'm cooking all day, so when I leave here a lot of times me and my kids will stop in and get fast food because I don't feel like cooking whenever I get home. So it's made me a little bit lazy in that aspect, that I don't cook as much at home now that I'm here. If I was at home we would be cooking. We would at least be able to eat at my mom's or somewhere, you know.

[00:59:30]

SR: Does your mom come and eat here?

[00:59:32]

TMH: Oh, yeah, every time that she comes. Yeah, my will come here, she'll bring some ladies from the church, or her and her sisters. They'll come just for the day, just to come here and eat.

[00:59:40]

SR: That's sweet.

[00:59:40]

TMH: Oh, yeah.

[00:59:41]

SR: Tia, you've given us a lot of time and I really appreciate it. Oh, I do have one other question I want to ask you and then I'll ask you a final question. I saw on the website that you have a cocktail menu too.

[00:59:59]

TMH: Uh huh.

[01:00:00]

SR: Tell me what the Levee Breach is. [*Laughs*]

[01:00:02]

TMH: Look, we had to give it a name, something that was representative of the Lower Ninth Ward and our struggle, and the Levee Breach—that just sounds like something that packs a big punch. [*Laughs*] But it's a rum cocktail and it has juice, different kind of fruit juices, and it was our own recipe that I came up with, and it's been a winner. We have the Levee Breach and we also have the Floodwater.

[01:00:27]

SR: What's the Floodwater? Is that a rum drink too?

[01:00:31]

TMH: It has rum in it as well, but it has apple and melon liqueur with it to give it its sweetness.

[01:00:38]

SR: When I read that name, I thought—. You know, there's the Hurricane—

[01:00:43]

TMH: Uh huh.

[01:00:45]

SR: —the Monsoon at Port of Call—

[01:00:45]

TMH: Well, we have the Levee Breach—

[01:00:46]

SR: —these sort of like ominous—

[01:00:46]

TMH: —and the—. Yeah. [*Laughs*]

[01:00:47]

SR: —sounding cocktails that are rum-based in New Orleans.

[01:00:50]

TMH: Yes.

[01:00:51]

SR: I'll have to try that. Is there anything that I haven't asked that you'd like to answer, or anything you'd like to say about anything?

[01:00:58]

TMH: I don't know. I think that anything you didn't [ask], I just kind of ran on and on about it anyway, so I don't think I left anything out. [*Laughs*]

[01:01:05]

SR: Well, it's been really great. I'm really happy that you were able to give us this time.

[01:01:09]

TMH: Oh, okay. Any time. It was great talking with you.

[01:01:12]

SR: Is there anything that you want to ask, Thomas?

[01:01:14]

Thomas Walsh: The only thing that I'd like to talk about, honestly—and it's almost for my purposes for the tape: kind of explaining how they're working on the exterior right now. So I guess you're still undergoing transformations?

[01:01:27]

TMH: Yes, we're getting some turbines put on the roof to take some of the hot air out of the attic because, being that it's an open kitchen, it's been a struggle with us with air conditioning. And that's just something that we just did not know going into the project. Since we've opened we've had an additional air conditioner put in, but that's still not enough. And then we also had work done on the hood and put an air curtain, which blows outdoor air in front of the hood, to prevent the hood from sucking out the air-conditioned air, and that still has not worked. So that's still a work in progress, trying to figure out the cooling of the building. So that's something else we're trying now. *[Laughs]*

[01:02:06]

SR: I see. Yeah, that explains some of the exterior sound. Do you have to worry about the historic implications when you're putting turbines on the roof, or is that not something—

[01:02:17]

TMH: No, not—.

[01:02:17]

SR: —with the historic commission or whatever?

[01:02:19]

TMH: I don't think that was an issue. I hope—.

[01:02:22]

SR: I'm just—. I know that—

[01:02:23]

TMH: Because I think that—.

[01:02:24]

SR: -when you live in a historic neighborhood, a lot of times it's just every little thing.

[01:02:27]

TMH: We had a turbine on there and it was too small, so we're having a larger one and an additional one put in, but it's not anything—. You may not even be able to see it from the street. So, yeah.

[01:02:38]

SR: Well, it's a great-looking building from the outside. Yeah, I guess another thing is, are there any plans for the—? Do you have any plans for the future, or are you just—

[01:02:48]

TMH: We have—

[01:02:49]

SR: —maintaining?

[01:02:49]

TMH: —accomplished a lot, because last year at this time we were just getting our alcohol license, and with that we did an addition, that bar area, because we were using that for storage. So last year we opened up this wall and added the bar and started serving alcohol. We also, maybe—. How long has it been? Right before Christmas we got video poker, so we got our gaming license and were able to put video poker machines in. Next I want to replace the awning outside. That's another project that we need to do that's coming up, and I guess we're going to

replace like some of the fascia board and stuff like that. Just something to spruce up the cosmetic appearance of the outside.

[01:03:29]

SR: Yeah. Well, I hope that'll keep you going for a long time.

[01:03:34]

TMH: Well, thank you. I—

[01:03:35]

SR: Thanks so much.

[01:03:35]

TMH: —appreciate it. [*Laughs*]

[01:03:36]

SR: Yeah. Thank you.

[01:03:38]

TMH: All right.

[01:03:48]

END OF INTERVIEW

