



**Nicole Taylor**  
**New York, New York**

\* \* \*

Date: May 4, 2018  
Location: Randy Fertel's Residence, New York, NY  
Interviewer: Rien Fertel  
Transcription: Technitype Transcripts  
Length: 1 hour, 3 minutes  
Project: Women Cookbook Writers

**[Begin Nicole Taylor Interview]**

[00:00:00]

**Rien Fertel:** This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is Friday, May the 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Friday afternoon just after 1:30, and I am in New York City with Nicole Taylor, and I'm going to have her introduce herself, please.

[0:00:23.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** Okay. My name is Nicole A. Taylor, or Nicole Annette Taylor. I was born and raised in Athens, Georgia, and I was born in 1978, so that makes me forty years old this year.

[0:00:36.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Congratulations.

[0:00:37.7]

**Nicole Taylor:** Thank you.

[0:00:38.6]

**Rien Fertel:** I'm almost there myself. **[Laughter]**

[0:00:39.7]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah.

[0:00:40.4]

**Rien Fertel:** You grew up in Athens. Tell me about growing up in Athens. What kind of Athens—I know it and I think most people know it as one of the premier college towns, right?

[0:00:55.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** Definitely, definitely. Oh, yeah. I didn't start really appreciating Athens, I think, until I left, because it's so funny, when I say I'm from Athens, the first thing people say now, "Oh, do you know R.E.M.?" **[Laughter]** They automatically go to the music. Or if it's food people, they go straight to Hugh Acheson, right?

I grew up in Athens. My great-grandfather, his name was George Taylor. He came from a small town, kind of Oconee. It was a little city in Oconee County. He brought our family there to Athens in the early-1900s. And then my grandfather, whom I never met, and then my mom, and my father's family is also from Athens as well. They go all the way back to the early-1900s too. So I'm really a fourth-generation Athenian.

[0:01:43.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow! And what did your families do?

[0:01:46.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** I would say, you know, definitely blue-collar workers. There are definitely folks in my family who, white-collar, went off to college, but I would say I come from a strong bloodline of blue-collar folks.

[0:02:00.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. And any in the restaurant industry?

[0:02:04.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** Not in the restaurant industry. My mom actually worked at a poultry plant for over thirty years and always had part-time jobs. My father wasn't born in Athens and never really lived in Athens, actually, but my grandmother and grandfather did. He lived in Chicago the majority of his life, and he was a shoe salesman, really fashionable guy. He passed away a few years ago. But that side of the family, which are the Dillard's, they're still in Athens and not really, what I say, into food. I would say huge, huge gardeners, though, everybody on both sides of my family. My grandfather—there's a story my aunt says that we grew up, which is now MLK—I grew up, and my mom, them, they grew up on, it was Water Street at the time, and now it's MLK Boulevard, and it's also North Oconee River Park. But prior to the mid-1970s, there were a group of shotgun houses and—

[0:03:07.0]

**Rien Fertel:** African-American neighborhood?

[0:03:09.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, African American neighborhood, traditionally, right on the riverbank, right—a lot of people know Weaver D’s. So right on that river, right there, if you hang a left after you pass Weaver D’s on the right, starting right there to about a mile, there were nothing but shotgun houses, which is now a beautiful park that people go and walk their dogs, and there’s a trail through it. But eminent domain came through, the city bought up the houses, and most of the families that lived there, all of them gardened, huge gardeners, barbecue. My mom tells stories of how they had chickens and stuff. And then there was a huge ordinance in Athens, I think in the early [19]70s, where they outlawed livestock and stuff in Athens proper, in the city, but people did it on the outskirts of Athens.

But, no, my grandfather was—he had two houses, which was a big deal, two shotgun houses, so he used to rent one out. And he had the biggest garden, as they say, in the neighborhood, so people would come to him if they needed food or they were low on food, and he would let everybody pick out of his garden. And he was a huge barbecue guy. I have stories of my mom and them saying every Friday he barbecued. **[Laughter]** And he was an avid fisherman.

[0:04:34.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Could you fish out of the river then?

[0:04:36.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** Not that river. There's a picture in my cookbook of him holding this long line of fish with one of the neighbors, Miss Nell. I never met my grandfather, but, yeah, he was a huge person into food, but I think that was kind of the way of life back then, you know?

[0:04:53.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Did he do cooking besides barbecue?

[0:04:57.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** No. I would say barbecue—he was married five times, and my mom, they weren't too fond of any of the wives. Their mother died when they were really young. But the last wife, Miss Elnora, all I heard was all the time that she was the best cook. And I remember as a child, so they moved in the new house, as they call it, which is directly across the street from the old shotgun house. So most of the black families that lived on the river, they built all these small brick homes across the street, so split-level brick homes there. I remember as a kid seeing all these seeds in these jars in the garage.

[0:05:45.7]

**Rien Fertel:** In your mom's house?

[0:05:46.7]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, in our home house, because it's my aunts, my mom, and my uncle, who's passed away, they all lived in this house. Well, it was their house afterwards. Now

just my two aunts live there. I remember seeing all these seeds and preserved stuff, and I didn't know what it—for a long time, and then finally they threw the stuff out. But now I'm like, "Dang. They threw all that stuff out."

[0:06:09.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[0:06:10.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, because when they moved to the new place, they kind of stopped backyard gardening. You're getting into the [19]80s now. In my opinion, I think people kind of assimilated.

[0:06:22.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah, kind of disappeared. So who was doing the cooking in that household?

[0:06:28.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** So when I grew up, I grew up primarily in that house on Third Street. It's at Third and MLK now. So I grew up in the house with my two aunts and my uncle. My mom moved out by then. She worked a lot, worked two jobs. My mom is a fabulous cook. My aunt—ehh, okay. But I grew up in a community where two streets over, everywhere in my neighborhood, everyone had a garden, and the whole neighborhood was full of fruits, vegetables, and people that could cook, or people who cooked stuff

over the weekend. I had cousins that lived on the second block. Both of them, husband and wife, they worked at a UGA sorority house for forty-something years. They were excellent cooks. I learned how to host parties from them. They were just the biggest inspiration in food for me. And my mom, my mom was kind of a rebel. Now when I think about myself, I can see my mom would have been that person who left Athens. She never did, but she's a fabulous cook, fabulous, fabulous cook, can whip up anything in a little time, like a full meal.

[0:07:43.2]

**Rien Fertel:** And you mentioned Weaver D's was kind of around the corner too.

[0:07:47.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah.

[0:07:47.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Were you aware of it? Did you go?

[0:07:49.8]

**Nicole Taylor:** Weaver D's did not open to, like, what, the mid-[19]80s or something. I forget the time they opened, but the funny thing is Weaver's stepmom went to my church, yeah, Magnolia Weaver. So she married his father, and she worked at Athens Country Club for years. And my church, East Friendship Baptist Church, that's been around since the late 1800s, was known as the church that had this fabulous food, and I

used to have Miss Magnolia's food all the time because she would bring food to the church functions afterwards, and you would get this—she would make great roast beef and this wild rice and cake, beautiful, beautiful cakes. She was just an excellent host because she had that country club experience. I think she worked there, like, really, really long time, yeah. So that's Weaver's stepmom.

But I didn't grow up—the funny thing is I didn't grow up—if I ate Southern food or if I wanted the food that Weaver was cooking, I had that at home or a cousins' house. It was like I was always told that, “That's expensive. We can make this at home,” you know?

[0:08:57.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Right. Would you call food “southern food” or “soul food?”

[0:09:00.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** Southern food. I never grew up using the word—or just “food.” I never kind of grew up using the word “soul food.” I don't remember that term until I went away to college.

[0:09:11.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. So where'd you go to college?

[0:09:13.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** I graduated from Clark Atlanta University in 2000, which is in Atlanta, obviously, in Atlanta University Center. And my dorm, I always like to tell people my freshman dorm and sophomore dorm literally faced the back of Busy Bee Cafe.

[0:09:28.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. **[Laughter]** So what was Busy Bee?

[0:09:31.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** Busy Bee Cafe is a legendary soul food spot. I think it's one of the oldest restaurants in Atlanta now. And that's when I kind of first heard the word "soul food." They have great fried chicken, fried corn, collard greens, specials where they'll have oxtails, an awesome blueberry cobbler—or blackberry cobbler; excuse me—lemonade. It's a little, great hole in the wall. I think they've been there probably, definitely over fifty-something years, civil rights spot right next to the original Paschal's, which is the historic civil rights motor lodge and restaurant. So I went to school right there, and that would be my little Southern food fix, or soul food fix.

[0:10:17.8]

**Rien Fertel:** And were you cooking? Like, when did you start cooking?

[0:10:20.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, man. I started cooking when I was like nine years old. I was super young. None of my aunts and uncle had kids. My uncle and my two aunts, they did not

have kids, so I was kind of like the family child, and they let me cook really young. And at first, it was like they would come home and I had baked a whole cake, and they're like, "What are you doing?" And then they just kind of just was like, "Let her do what she's gonna do." And I started cooking young, like fried corn, cakes, frying pork chop.

My aunt, when I stayed with my mom or before I moved with my mom, if I was over there, she would put a note out and say, "Hey, this is in the fridge." I would cook food. I would cook for the house not because I had to, but just because I was just like, "I can cook."

[0:11:14.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And who had taught you?

[0:11:16.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** Watching people. I was a kid that—there weren't many kids in my family at the time that were, like, close in age, so, I would be at cousins' house, they were older than me, maybe like in high school, or an older cousin was babysitting me and they're cooking, and I'm literally sitting in the kitchen watching what they're doing. Or they may ask me to do one, two simple things, and I'm just sitting there talking—I've always been a talker—and watching them. I think that is definitely how I learned how to cook, by watching people.

[0:11:48.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And do you remember—this is an interview kind of—the main subject is cookbooks, so do you remember any cookbooks in the house or early cookbooks?

[0:11:58.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** Definitely no cookbooks in the house. **[Laughter]** Definitely no cookbooks in the house—I have, or had, thirteen great-aunts and -uncles. All of them, except for a few, lived in Athens, and my great-aunt Bessie Goolsby probably was the biggest influence. She definitely did not have cookbooks. I grew up with magazines in the house. I'm still obsessed with *Essence* magazine and *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, so the closest I saw to a cookbook are the back pages of those magazines that would have a recipe or something about lifestyle, but no cookbooks around. I would say that my cousins, them, the ones that probably influenced me the most that worked at the sorority house, maybe they had one or two cookbooks, maybe like a—

[0:12:43.8]

**Rien Fertel:** These are people that cooked the food at the sorority house?

[0:12:45.8]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, yeah. Tom Gartrell and Bonnie Gartrell, both of them have passed away.

[0:12:51.4]

**Rien Fertel:** And what sorority was that?

[0:12:53.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** That was Alpha Chi Omega.

[0:12:56.2]

**Rien Fertel:** That you were in?

[0:12:57.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** No. Alpha Chi Omega is a sorority house on UGA's campus that they cooked at.

[0:13:03.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, I see. And these are relatives of yours.

[0:13:05.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** Relatives—

[0:13:06.1]

**Rien Fertel:** I'm sorry, sorry.

[0:13:07.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** —that lived on the next street from me. I grew up on Third Street, their house was on Second Street. They had two daughters who are ten-plus years older than

me. But they worked at a sorority house. They were huge cooks, entertained. They were the house everyone in our family always went to. They always had food. Someone was always staying there. There was two refrigerators in the house all the time, a deep freezer. It was something always going on with food.

But, no, they worked there for fifty years. Bonnie Gartrell, she was in the Air Force, actually, one of the first African-American women in the Air Force back in the day, and then after that—I'm sure she came back to the segregated South, and, unfortunately, she started working at a sorority house and stayed there for a really long time.

[0:13:51.9]

**Rien Fertel:** And she was a great-aunt?

[0:13:53.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** No. She actually was my mom's first cousin.

[0:13:58.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, wow. Okay.

[0:13:59.8]

**Nicole Taylor:** But they were more like aunts because they were older, but, yeah, they were my mom's first cousins, so that would have been my second cousins. But I think we never got that granular. It was just like auntie or cousin or something like that.

[0:14:11.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah. Do you remember Athens? Was Athens a segregated city?

[0:14:18.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** Always.

[0:14:19.5]

**Rien Fertel:** The history of Atlanta, I think, is well told.

[0:14:21.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** Always.

[0:14:22.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Is Athens?

[0:14:24.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** I grew up in Athens very, very aware of race, very much aware that I lived on the black side of town. I lived in East Athens. I'm very much aware that I was different. I was in gifted programs. I was always *the* only black person or few of a handful in certain classes. So I learned really early on being tracked in school, what they call tracked, that Athens was a very segregated place.

And it's so funny, because my mother used to take me downtown to eat. I used to love Cooking and Co., Cooking Company. It was in Athens. The Grill is still there, A&A Bakery. And my mom really loved downtown Athens. She loves vintage clothes, she loves shopping, and so that's one of the things she hooked me to really early. And when I got older, I realized, "Wait. There are kind of no black people downtown." And when I got, like, high school and college, I remember trying to go to bars and experiencing stuff when they didn't want to let local black kids in, so I understood super early in Athens that race was kind of a part of the culture in a certain way.

[0:15:48.7]

**Rien Fertel:** And how was—one more question about—well, about race, and specifically in Atlanta. So you graduated in 2000, so this is when Atlanta is taking off—

[0:16:01.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, yeah.

[0:16:01.9]

**Rien Fertel:** —as, like, the mecca—and this is just my estimation—the mecca of African-American culture in the U.S. at the moment, and it's at its top right now with the television show and the music that comes out of the city and everything.

[0:16:14.4]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, yeah, completely different city.

[0:16:15.6]

**Rien Fertel:** So what was it like on the rise when all this was, like, gearing up?

[0:16:19.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** Well, I graduated from high school in 1996, the year of the Atlanta Olympics, and so I went to Atlanta at the height of the Olympics. That was—oh, my gosh, everyone was talking about the Olympics and how it was going to change the city, and on the Clark Atlanta’s campus, there were new stadiums, there were new—everything was new, everything was exciting. There was a whole group of people who moved to Atlanta because of the prosperity of the Olympics. It was beautiful. It was the first time in my life that I was able to see progressive, educated black people. I had never seen that before in my life.

Of course I saw that in Athens because I grew up in a community of diverse black folks, right? My church, there were teachers there, there were doctors there, some of the first black doctors to practice in Athens. I was exposed to all that in Athens, but when I went to Atlanta and I saw a city that was like, wow, the people that are running the city are black, I was in awe. I was in awe. I remember driving in Atlanta, and sometimes I would just look up and be like, “I’m in the land of milk and honey.” Because I grew up in Athens, and to leave Athens and to go to an Atlanta was like the crème de la crème. Few people could do it, even though it’s so easy, but it takes a lot of mental—I don’t know. It’s this weird thing to leave Athens, right?

But it was an exciting time. It was very—I lived in Atlanta from [19]96 to 2008, and now when I go back, to me, it feels like a different city. **[Laughter]** I lived on campus, which is in the West End, Atlanta University Center, and I always lived in town the whole time I lived in Atlanta, so I saw Atlanta really change. And now it's really different. **[Laughter]** It's totally, totally different.

[0:18:17.1]

**Rien Fertel:** So what'd you do between 2000, graduating, and [20]08?

[0:18:20.7]

**Nicole Taylor:** So 2000, I graduated from Clark Atlanta, got a job at the American Cancer Society, thought that I would be a public health educator, kind of sort of always done nonprofit work. Even now, I work at a—or do consultant work for a culinary center and café. And for the last I don't know how many years, I've tried to get away from nonprofit work, but I still kind of come back, and it usually always involves health and food. I think that's something that's kind of in me, and actually my undergrad degree is in community health education. So I've kind of always been interested in this intersection of health, community, and food, in this weird way.

But I was into food then, the crazy thing is, but I wasn't using the word “foodie.” I remember my college roommate, who actually I grew up with in Athens, too, she called me the “black Betty Crocker.” That was her nickname for me. And I got my first cookbook in college from a college roommate who's actually from Miami, but she has

Jamaican—she’s Jamaican descent. She bought me a cookbook. That is the first person who bought me a cookbook. I still have it.

[0:19:33.2]

**Rien Fertel:** What was it?

[0:19:33.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** Is it like—it’s not the *Joy of Cooking*. It’s the other one, I think maybe *Better Homes and Gardens Cookbook*.

[0:19:44.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Like a compendium style.

[0:19:45.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, it was just kind of like basic, classic basic recipes. But that was the first cookbook that I ever owned, so that was [19]97, [19]98. But, no, I cooked in my dorm. I had like a dorm, apartment dorm. Then I moved off campus. I was the place where people came for the party, for the food.

I actually still have at home a whole notebook of—back in the day, I would go on Food Network and print out recipes, and I would clip—I used to clip recipes from the newspaper, from *AJC* and magazines, and I still have all those. But I was into food big time then. Didn’t have the language for it, probably didn’t even have the best tools in the kitchen, but I was always cooking and always interested in restaurants in Atlanta.

[0:20:37.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Did you ever work in restaurants?

[0:20:39.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** Never. Never. My first job, though, at fifteen was at Wendy's, at a fast-food joint in Athens, but that's the closest I've done.

[0:20:47.5]

**Rien Fertel:** When you were working in Atlanta, going to school in Atlanta, were you writing outside of the classroom, outside of the nonprofit job?

[0:20:56.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** I always kind of wrote poetry, which is kind of funny, and I actually have always journaled. I have journals all the way back twenty-plus years ago. Yikes. I don't even want to open those. But I always journaled, and I did a little poetry. I haven't done poetry in—oof—years, in high school and stuff; I was in the Poetry Club. But I didn't write. I didn't even see that as an option. I had no idea that I'd be writing about food and writing a cookbook. No, not at all.

[0:21:28.7]

**Rien Fertel:** So when and why did you move up here to New York?

[0:21:32.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** So I moved here in 2008. I met my husband in Atlanta. He's born and raised in Atlanta. He likes to claim he's so much from Atlanta that he was born at Grady Hospital. **[Laughter]**

[0:21:44.1]

**Rien Fertel:** Where'd y'all meet?

[0:21:45.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** We met at a networking event. There was a networking event, and at the time, what I didn't tell you is I got into making candies in Atlanta. A college friend, we both were into food, and we used to sell—we would go to Costco's and we would buy the big things of, like, peanut butter cookies and package them in cellophane, and we would sell them, probably like our junior or senior year at Clark Atlanta. And she was really good into making baskets and really beautiful ribbon. And then we start seeing these, candy moulds, so we started making candy. I can't even say we were making chocolate, because we were just really melting down bad chocolate and putting them in moulds, right? And started doing that, but then I got really serious, because I'm like, "Wait. This is a whole industry." So just kind of doing that as a hobby.

So I met my husband because she and I went to a networking event and he was there and he was hosting it. He's an artist and he also works in advertising as a design director. I didn't think anything of him, except for he asked us if we made chocolates,

and he was like, “Wow. That’s intriguing.” And he added us to his email list, which was all about art.

Then I ran into him and said, “Hey, I’m looking for someone to design a logo for Taylor Made Chocolate, because that was kind of my little candy company at the time, and we just became friends, and that’s it. The rest is history. We moved here because he got a job to head up the digital wing of a multicultural ad agency, so we moved here.

[0:23:22.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay, so in 2008.

[0:23:24.4]

**Nicole Taylor:** 2008, we moved here.

[0:23:25.4]

**Rien Fertel:** You moved to Brooklyn?

[0:23:26.4]

**Nicole Taylor:** Moved to Brooklyn. I’ve been in the same apartment for ten years.

[0:23:29.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow. That’s rare, right?

[0:23:30.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** Very.

[0:23:30.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow. So what did you do? How did you adjust?

[0:23:35.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** So I came here—he had a job, and I was working at Kate Spade in Atlanta part-time. Crazy, I used to sell real estate in Atlanta. I feel like I've done, like, a million gazillion things, but food has kind of like always been in the background. And I remember I had a friend who I was, like, doing real estate deals with, and I never was really good at real estate, by the way, because I just wasn't good at it. I'm not going to say I wasn't good. It just wasn't my passion. She used to tell me all the time, "You need to write a book. You should do, like, a Zagat."

And I was like, "Why?"

She was like, "Because you know all the good restaurants, where to eat, where to drink."

I remember one of my colleagues at the real estate firm at the time was co-owner of the Watershed, and she was partnered with Emily [Saliers], that was her life partner at the time. And I was constantly around food, and it wouldn't escape me, but I didn't realize that food was going to be my life and my career.

So I moved here. I was fortunate enough to get a job at New Yorkers for Parks, which is a nonprofit that does, like, environmental outreach and advocacy work in New

York. But I was obsessed with food. I used to keep this long list, I still kind of keep a list of where to eat, where to go, and I would get off work and just really explore every day.

And then one day I was, like, really getting into cheese and obsessed with cheese. I was getting Anne Saxelby's, Saxelby Cheesemongers' email, and it had something about a podcast, a radio. It wasn't even called podcast. I think it was just like Heritage Radio Network and her show, and I started listening to it. I'm like, "Whoa. This is amazing. Maybe I should do a show." I didn't know jack crap about media, but I was so in the mix of what was happening at food at the time. I was hosting event—not even events—like, get-togethers at my house, and we would bring in food people, and we would just watch food documentaries and set up a makeshift thing, and having dinner parties. I didn't see it as a career. But I was like, "I should pitch them a show, and I really want to focus on black and brown people who are doing food stuff." I pitched the show, and that's it.

[0:26:00.6]

**Rien Fertel:** In New York?

[0:26:01.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** In New York. That really—not really. That kicked off my food media career.

[0:26:06.5]

**Rien Fertel:** And you called it *Hot Grease*?

[0:26:08.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** Called it *Hot Grease*.

[0:26:09.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Why'd you call it *Hot Grease*?

[0:26:09.7]

**Nicole Taylor:** Well, I was trying to think of something that kind of denoted the South, but also something that a lot of cultures use to make food, so that was it, hot grease.

[0:26:21.1]

**Rien Fertel:** And so what was the—I listened to the first episode.

[0:26:25.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, God. I haven't listened to that in forever. How was that?

[0:26:27.6]

**Rien Fertel:** You interview a milk guy—

[0:26:29.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** Wow.

[0:26:30.5]

**Rien Fertel:** —a guy who was doing milk, and then someone else.

[0:26:34.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** Whoa.

[0:26:34.4]

**Rien Fertel:** I forget. The milk guy was your very first guest, and you tell him, like, “I’m going to remember you as my very first guest.” **[Laughter]**

[0:26:38.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, Michael Crupain.

[0:26:39.6]

**Rien Fertel:** I think that’s right, yeah.

[0:26:40.8]

**Nicole Taylor:** And he works for Dr. Oz now, I think. Wow, that was, what, 2009, 2010?

[0:26:45.5]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah. I have the date. September. Early September 2009.

[0:26:50.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** Wow. Yeah, I was so nervous. I'll never forget that day. I was so nervous. And Roberta's was so funny, because Heritage Radio Network, where I was hosting *Hot Grease*, no one knew Roberta's at the time. Now everyone knows them as, like, the pizza hipster, whatever. And they had, like, a scrappy backyard. There was a car in the backyard, which is now like a patio where people are drinking their wine.

[0:27:15.2]

**Rien Fertel:** It's really beautiful now, right? **[Laughter]**

[0:27:16.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah. But, yeah, it was like the early days of Brooklyn being hip.

[0:27:22.4]

**Rien Fertel:** So was it a live show? You'd have call-ins?

[0:27:29.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** It was live with call-ins, and it was so funny, because now everybody—we're in 2018, you say "podcast," everyone knows exactly what you're talking about. People didn't understand what a podcast was, so we would just say "online radio show."

[0:27:40.4]

**Rien Fertel:** I see, I see. Were you scared to get into the studio and do radio and talk?

[0:27:44.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** I was scared. I was scared. I took Adrian, my husband, to the first meeting with Jack, Jack Inslee, who I love dearly. He's now moved on. He's at the Line Hotel in D.C. He started their whole podcasting thing, and they have a whole podcasting setup at the Lion. And he was just like, "Just be yourself." I was like, "Oh, God. But I'm crazy when I'm myself." **[Laughter]** I was super scared. I did not know what I was doing at all. The thing that I had going for me is that I already listened to a bunch of podcasts. I was already listening to *The Splendid Table*. I was already listening to *Good Food*. Farai Chideya had a new show on NPR back then. I used to listen to that via podcast. So I basically would just study what Lynne Rossetto Kasper or Evan Kleiman. And I kind of at first was, like, structuring my show after that, and Jack would be—and I would have all this paper where I would write down my script, and he was like, "You just should just be yourself. Stop reading and just be yourself."

[0:28:47.1]

**Rien Fertel:** And at that time, were you meeting food people?

[0:28:53.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, my gosh.

[0:28:54.1]

**Rien Fertel:** You said restaurants. Like, what kind of scene—

[0:28:55.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** I was meeting so many food people. It was at the time where you could literally open up a magazine or subscribe to a newsletter and there was a food event happening in Brooklyn almost every day. So I literally made it my business to go to food events all the time. And there also was this huge DIY movement going on, which I was a part of, like food swaps, and making pickles, making jams, making biscuits and swapping them, and all kind of stuff was going on in Brooklyn at the time, and I just jumped in the scene of it, not because I was in media and I wanted interviews, but because I was interested in it.

And then it was also at that point where I was like, “Wait. Some of this stuff that folks are doing and talking about is the same stuff I grew up seeing.” So I kind of made the connection of all of this stuff that I forgot about or tried to push in the back of my mind because I thought it was country and I was trying to be cosmopolitan, it just came back to me.

[0:29:56.5]

**Rien Fertel:** And has that already disappeared in the past ten years? Is Brooklyn still very heavy DIY and backyard happenings, or is it all geared toward the restaurant scene now? What’s happening in—has it changed in Brooklyn? It feels like it has, as someone—I left Brooklyn in 2008.

[0:30:16.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** You know, here's the thing. When I go to other parts of the country and other parts of the world, people are still fascinated with Brooklyn. They're still like, "Oh, my gosh. I saw this in Brooklyn." Or you see what I call clones of Brooklyn somewhere else, and I'm just kind of like, "Oh, wow. This is, like, so Brooklyn ten years ago." I think it's morphed. I think a lot of these folks that I interviewed—I could go back through some of the interviews—they've either gone out of business or they're doing something else or they moved to Austin or they won a pie contest and started a pie company, but then they partnered with someone that makes cupcakes, and now they own a bar. I think it's evolved. I think people that were making jams in their kitchen sink are like, "How do I scale up at Whole Foods now?" or, "How do I get big accounts?"

I look at Morris Kitchen. I remember interviewing her super first. It was just her and her brother. Now they're just everywhere. You see their Simple Syrups everywhere. So I would say that it's evolved. Even myself. Ten years ago, you wouldn't have told me I would be writing something for the *New York Times*, never in a million years. So I see growth. I see people who took that movement and turned it into careers or turned it into businesses that they've even sold.

[0:31:45.7]

**Rien Fertel:** So one more question. You did the show between September [20]09, August 2013, I think, is there a favorite episode? Is there one that sticks out—

[0:31:55.4]

**Nicole Taylor:** Wow.

[0:31:56.3]

**Rien Fertel:** —if someone’s listening to this? Because it’s all online. Every single episode is.

[0:31:59.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah. What’s so crazy is that I even sometimes forget that I even did shows. People always ask me when I’m going to bring the podcast back, and I want to, but I spent a lot of time. I would spend about twenty hours a week prepping for that show, and I was really serious about it because I wanted to have a show that was different from the other shows on the network. At the time, it was probably like ten shows on the network. Now they have double or triple that. I wanted to make sure that people I interviewed weren’t the same folks that folks were interviewing already, and I wanted to get people who folks weren’t talking about. But then every now and then I’m reminded that the content is still relevant.

So I guess Heritage, when they put their newsletter out, they go through the archives sometimes. So they went to the archives and they found some shows that I talked about MLK, Martin Luther King, on Martin Luther King Day, and it was one from 2012 or 2013 where I was talking about Georgia Gilmore and Dr. Martin Luther King, and they put it in the newsletter, and two other people picked it up. Brooklyn Businesses picked it up and put it on their Facebook page, like, “Listen to this podcast.”

And that made me feel good, because I’m like, “Okay, Georgia Gilmore keeps coming up now.” I think she never goes away, but definitely I hear more people talking

about her. But I'm like, "Okay. I was ahead of my time." And that makes me proud that I was talking about stuff way before it became trending. Another instance is Michael Twitty just won, what, two James Beard Awards, and everyone's discovered him, and I interviewed him in 2012.

[0:33:42.3]

**Rien Fertel:** [Laughter] That's a long time ago.

[0:33:44.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** I interviewed him, like, four times, like, four times, and the first one was 2012. And it's so funny, because I listened to the interview the day that he won the Beards, the next morning, and he's been consistent. The same thing he was saying in 2012 is the same thing he was saying in 2018. Yeah, so that makes me proud that I never—I only remember it when it comes up when something happens like that and I'm like, "Oh, wait, I think I interviewed that person. I should go back and listen to it." But most of the time, I don't even think about it. It seems like a long time ago.

[0:34:17.2]

**Rien Fertel:** So what is the Food Culturist?

[0:34:19.8]

**Nicole Taylor:** Ah! So I was trying to—back in 2008, 2009, I was trying to like, "Oh, I need something super cool to put on Twitter." This was like when Twitter first popped

off. I was like, “I’m going to call myself a culturist,” which is a person who’s just generally into all aspects of food culture, and I started using it. I should have trademarked it, because I think I saw one of these, like, trade magazines using that and defining what it is. But I would say I definitely probably was the first person to use “food culturist.” So I think it’s someone that just is not focused on restaurants, and not just focused on cooking at home, but focused on agriculture, focused on the people, focused on the politics of food, so that’s how I kind of define myself, as that. It was really an online moniker.

[0:35:13.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. Well, I went back to check it out. I’d been on the website before. I went back, and I saw something I’ve never seen. You have like—on one page, you have like a motto, and it’s got to be two or three points, and the first one says—

[0:35:25.4]

**Nicole Taylor:** Is that the old website?

[0:35:25.9]

**Rien Fertel:** —the manifesto.

[0:35:26.7]

**Nicole Taylor:** Is that the old website? Oh, my gosh.

[0:35:28.6]

**Rien Fertel:** I think it's the old website.

[0:35:29.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** You were able to find that?

[0:35:29.5]

**Rien Fertel:** I found it, yes. **[Laughter]**

[0:35:30.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yikes.

[0:35:31.4]

**Rien Fertel:** But you have a manifesto, and it says, "We believe that eating is a political act."

[0:35:35.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, that's old.

[0:35:36.4]

**Rien Fertel:** And then it says, "We believe that the South will rise again."

[0:35:39.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yes.

[0:35:39.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Which to a segment of white society means something completely different.

[0:35:44.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, yeah. I did that on purpose, to kind of say that the South will rise again, because when I look at myself, when I look at growing up as a black person in the South and my mom's South, even though there were a lot of pain and heartaches and a lot of tragedy, there was also a real sense of family and togetherness. And so when I said I believed that the South will rise again, that's what I was talking about in terms of, you know, when you look at black families and everyone's not spread out, everyone was close-knit, everyone believe in helping each other, so *my* South—I guess I should have said then, “I believe that *my* South will rise again,” the South that I knew. Because when I go back to Athens, it's totally different. Everyone wants to go to Zaxby's. **[Laughter]** No one's going to the farmers' market. They're going to the new Wing Spot, which is cool. I mean, I like those things every now and then, but I'm looking for that nostalgia. I never really get it.

So I think that statement about “the South will rise again” is more so me searching for those people like my cousins and my great-aunts and what they valued around food: the grease can on the stove, and you put it in there and fry an egg, *that's* what I'm talking about by “the South will rise again,” which it's kind of happening in the food way **[Laughter]** and in the other way, too, the not so pleasant way. But that's what I meant when I said it.

[0:37:11.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Was it hard adjusting to the South here in New York?

[0:37:16.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, my God.

[0:37:17.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Or talk about maybe the Southern kitchen. I know there's so many aspects we could go there, but kind of the Southern ingredients. We were talking about buttermilk before we started rolling the tape. What was the search for Southern ingredients even just ten years ago?

[0:37:31.8]

**Nicole Taylor:** Difficult. Still can be very difficult here. It's gotten better. I think I was telling you earlier, you asked me what I had for breakfast when we were doing the mic check, and I said I had frozen peaches. I made a smoothie. I usually make a smoothie every morning with buttermilk, and I had a half a banana in it. And I was telling you how difficult it is to find real buttermilk here, because people think that low-fat whatever that is is real. So Greene Grape Provisions, which is my favorite store, the buyer there, harassed her for two years to get real buttermilk. So I get it from there or the farmers' market, there's a guy that does buttermilk there, but it's hard to find real buttermilk here.

It's not like—and cornmeal. I mean, I can go back home, go down South, go to any grocery store, and take your pick. Can't really find cornmeal.

So, yeah, it's still very difficult for me just to walk into a bodega or corner store or grocery store to buy—or keep my Southern pantry full. So I do online stuff. I go down South and dry-ice **[Laughter]** frozen peas back here to have in my fridge. There are a few places that do Southern stuff here, a few. Court Street Grocers, they have Southern stuff. They have Geechie Boy Mill rice and peas. They have cane syrup there. I've written about them, I talk about them, I mention them in my book a lot, and they kind of know I'm always looking for Southern stuff.

But, no, it's very difficult, but I've had the most amazing, inspiring interactions on that journey of finding stuff. My corner—here in New York, people call stuff bodegas or corner markets because they're not full-on grocery stores. I live in Bedford-Stuyvesant, which is mainly a neighborhood full of Caribbean people and people who migrated to New York City from the South. It's definitely a mixture. So when I go to the Carib Mart, which is closest to my house where I shop a lot, at the end of summer, the owner always has muscadines, and he has them labeled “swamp grapes.” **[Laughter]** And I'm like, “What's this?” But I buy them up.

And then I'm standing there, and these other old Southern ladies—and then I start talking—they more so hear my voice, and then they're like, “Where you from?” Because I know when you're buying muscadines, you know what they are.

And then, oh, gosh, every year at the holidays, it's like a fight to find collard greens, like good collard greens. I don't know what it is, but I have to go to—no Whole Foods, no grocery stores outside of a black neighborhood in Brooklyn that you're going

to find collard greens. I remember literally standing in line at—I can't even remember what grocery store it was, me and ten other people waiting for them to restock the collard greens section to get collards. I think it was for New Year's. It was like right at New Year's. So we're literally standing there, and then we're sitting there like checking the leaves and—

[0:40:52.0]

**Rien Fertel:** [Laughter] I would think collards, of anything—

[0:40:55.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** No, it's hard to find collards here, especially ones that—beautiful leaves that look—yeah. Either they're—yeah.

[0:41:02.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. So you publish your cookbook in 2015—

[0:41:07.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** Correct.

[0:41:08.1]

**Rien Fertel:** —*Up South Cookbook*. How did that happen? Did an agent call you? Did you put together a proposal? What happened?

[0:41:16.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah. I never really had on my list of goals that I wanted to write a cookbook, but after doing the podcast for so long, I was like, “Okay. Well, seems like everyone around me is, like, getting a book deal right now, so maybe I should pursue a book.” The original idea was to look at makers, black makers who were doing products and stuff, and then where to buy Southern—funny that we’re talking about this—where to buy and eat Southern up North. That was the original idea, and my agent was like, “No, this needs to be a cookbook, and we want to hear your stories.”

How I found my agent, oh, wow. How I found my agent would be through people I met over, what, at that time, five years in the food scene. Justin Schwartz, he works at a publishing house. I didn’t even really know he was a food editor. He was an editor there, and I mentioned to him that I wanted to write a cookbook, and he was like, “Well, why didn’t you tell me? We should talk.” He was like, “Well, do you have an agent?”

I said, “No, I have a list of people. I’m going to cold-call them.”

He was like, “No, that’s not how it works.”

He was very generous and did introductions to me, and Anton [Nocito], a guy who used to own a simple syrup company who’s now a chef, he’s always been a chef, but back then he had P&H Soda—I mentioned to him that I was writing a cookbook, and at the same time, he was like, “I’ve got the perfect person for you.” He didn’t tell me his agent’s name, but she so happened to be on my list.

And so I remember when she emailed me, and she said, “Wow. I guess it’s meant for us to work together because two people have emailed me about you in the last week, and both of them just kind of said, ‘Nicole’s great, and we think she has a unique story.’”

And, yeah, Sharon Bowers became my agent, and, actually, Sharon, I think, is originally from the South, mature, old-school literary agent here in New York.

[0:43:21.2]

**Rien Fertel:** And what did you want the book to be or what did the book become?

[0:43:24.7]

**Nicole Taylor:** The book became—like I said before, my original idea is where to eat in the North, where to eat in the Northeast, and she was like, “No, this needs to be a cookbook.” So she was like, “You need to go back and do this, this, this.” It took me a year, like, to do this, this, this. **[Laughter]**

And then it took a really, really long time for—well, not a really long time. We shopped it to, like, eighteen different publishing houses, and they were like, “Eh, nope. We have too many Southern books.” I think that some of that might have been not knowing kind of what to do with me, because I kind of had, like, this—I’m going to be honest with you. I think a lot of people sometimes kind of look at me as a black hipster, but then they’re like, “Oh, well, does she appeal to, like, middle-class black people or is she like a—?” People are really confused, so I think a lot of people didn’t know what to do with that, but then again, I think a lot of people say, “No, that’s an asset. She’s, like, connected to the Brooklyn crowd.”

So eventually, Countryman Press, they were interested off the bat, and we kind of waited around and then went back to them, and the rest is history.

[0:44:41.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And did you go back home to do research?

[0:44:43.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** I did.

[0:44:43.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Because the book's about you. I mean, it's a personal—

[0:44:45.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, it's—I went back home, definitely. I went back home twice during the process because I wanted to tell stories about home. I wanted to tell stories about me at home and the people that influenced me, and then me in Atlanta, and then me in Brooklyn, so that's what you kind of see throughout the book, the headnotes. And you see Brooklyn in 2008, 2009, you see Athens as a youth, and you see Atlanta as a young adult becoming a woman, and that is all throughout my headnotes. And all the food. Everything you see in there, a lot of people ask me like, “Why don't you have shrimp and grits?” I'm like, well, I never grew up eating shrimp and grits, and I really didn't have it in Atlanta. It's not something that I had in New York. I grew up eating—I eat grits multiple times a week. I grew up on grits, so there's a whole chapter on grits.

But, no, it's really the recipes that I cooked or folks in my family cooked or I cook now or stuff that I just got influenced by living in Brooklyn, particularly living in a mainly Caribbean or predominantly Caribbean neighborhood. That influenced a lot. And

just being in New York City where you can just throw a penny in whatever direction and, boom, you're in a whole another neighborhood with a whole another food culture.

[0:46:05.6]

**Rien Fertel:** When you were pitching it and writing it, did you have a book or established cookbook author that you looked up to, like, “Ah, that’s my icon, that’s who I want to—?”

[0:46:16.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** I love Lisa Fain. Yeah, I love Lisa Fain because Lisa Fain told—and she blurb-ed the book. Her whole entire thing is about homesick Texans, like what does it mean to move to New York City and be from Texas and be from the South. I love Lisa Fain, so I was really happy to get her blurb. I always respect all the work that she—that was one of the folks that I looked up to.

Even though Melissa Clark didn’t blurb my book or anything, but I’ve said it on numerous occasions, I love Melissa Clark as a writer, but also as a businesswoman. Before she became a regular staff person at the *New York Times*, she was writing multiple cookbooks and contributing to the *Times*, and she’s someone that I look at as a model of being consistent, working hard, so she’s one of the folks that I look up to in the time period.

Of course Jessica Harris. You can’t write about black food and not understand black food and black culture without just understanding her work, so she’s definitely one of the folks that I looked at her work and her cookbooks, how she tells stories and weaves

history in there. I wouldn't say that I'm doing the same, but you've got to acknowledge what she's done in terms of opening the door.

And Bryant Terry, because, I mean, I followed Bryant Terry forever, but I remember when they were shopping my book, everyone would say, "So, this is kind of like a Bryant Terry book." And I'm like, "Eh, kinda." But he opened the door for a new generation of black food writers to get book deals, because before that, we only had Jessica Harris and a few other black writers here and there, but I think Bryant Terry really opened the door up for folks like me and any other young black food writers that came along. He had a very distinct voice, what he wanted to say, how he wanted his food to look, national press.

So I definitely think those are folks who I kind of in those early days looked at as like a guiding light.

[0:48:29.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah. And just before this was published, you came out with, I think, two kind of—

[0:48:38.3]

**Nicole Taylor:** Zines.

[0:48:39.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Zines. Can you talk about them?

[0:48:39.9]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, my gosh. **[Laughter]** Yeah.

[0:48:43.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Like, what they are and what the impetus was.

[0:48:47.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** So I'm doing my podcast, and at the time, I would have all these, like, tourism boards or PR marketing people reaching out like, "Hey, you want to go on a trip to Philadelphia? You want to go to Australia? You want to go to Australia? Food and Wine will pay for it."

Obviously, I knew by that time after doing this that they wanted coverage, either through a podcast or—I kind of had a blog back then. Now I look back on it and I'm like, "Eh, it was horrible."

Or they wanted a blog post. And I was an early adapter on social media. I was on Twitter in, like, 2008, 2009, and so I used to Tweet a lot. And I was on Facebook. So I just really kind of was on social media, so these folks would basically take me out, show me all the food, show me all the culture. But what I didn't know how to do or didn't even—I didn't even think it was possible, like, "Oh, I can pitch this to a major publication." Or when I did, I didn't hear anything back because I didn't have those big connects then. No one was really checking for Heritage like they check for it now.

So I was like, "I'm going to put out my own stuff." I went to Philadelphia, and this was 2014, 2013 when I went to Philly, and I was like, "I have captured all these

amazing stories and went to all these amazing things.” I’m like, “How do I pitch this?” I was like, “I’m just going to put together my own little zine,” and so that’s what I did. It’s the *Modern Travelers’ Green Zine*, and it was fashioned after Mr. Victor Green. He had the *Negro Travelers’ Green Zine*, which a lot of people called the *Green Book*. Actually, *Green Book*. I said *Green Zine*. So it was called the *Negro Travelers’ Green Book*, and now everyone’s talking about it and you can do a Google search, and everyone’s talking about it. But it was a guide for African Americans pre-1964 Civil Rights Act of the safe places to eat, get gas, and travel.

So I kind of fashioned it after that, so I broke it down to eats, culture, shopping. And the Philly one is kind of focused on black-owned restaurants, black-owned shops, but it’s more than that in there. I put it out, and Brooklyn had a Zine Fest at the time. Sold it at Brooklyn Zine Fest, Greenlight Bookstore, which I love them dearly, and they always support me, probably because I spend too much money buying books in there. They’re like, “Yeah, we will sell it in here.” And Afropunk at the time was not as big as it is now, but they do a big booth at Afropunk, so they had my zine at Afropunk, and I remember thinking that was a big freaking deal. And it is a big deal. Seems like so long ago. But, yeah, I did the zines, and I kind of just got a crew of people. I didn’t really make any money off of it.

[0:51:53.0]

**Rien Fertel:** But did you hear from anyone using them as—

[0:51:56.1]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yeah, I have a few friends, and random people would buy them. I had it on Etsy, and people would use them. Every now and then, even still, people will send an email, and it's like, "Oh, look at your *Green Zine*," or send a message. But I couldn't—I mean, now everyone's doing indie mags, right? **[Laughter]** I was ahead of the game again.

[0:52:19.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah. I have, I think, one more question about Brooklyn. So the past ten years, Brooklyn has become synonymous with, I guess, progressiveness in all types of different fields, but it's also synonymous with gentrification, changes both good and bad, let's say. So how has—and you've been a part of the scene from the very beginning, the food scene, the DIY scene, the making-pickles-in-your-backyard scene. And you're a black woman. Was there—did you run up against racism? Did you run up against bigotry? Did you run up against misogynists? Were you embraced or was it not so inclusive as maybe some people imagine Brooklyn is and was?

[0:53:17.0]

**Nicole Taylor:** Well, I got to say this. I live in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Bedford-Stuyvesant is the equivalent of Harlem, which is in Manhattan. Bedford-Stuyvesant, or Bed-Stuy, is a black neighborhood. It's a black, mainly working-class neighborhood, but there are more than—there are all kind of artists that live in Bedford-Stuyvesant, celebrities, all types of people live in Bedford, so I always felt super comfortable in the neighborhood, and I made a deliberate choice to live there and still live there, even

though if I wanted to try to buy something there, it's almost impossible. Ten years ago, you could buy a brownstone for half a million dollars. Now it's upward, almost \$1.5 million.

But I've stayed in the neighborhood because there is still so much social and political capital in the neighborhood, and it's still very much about family, and there's still so many old-school Southern people, and also, too, a huge concentration of young black artists and creatives who are black that live in Bedford-Stuyvesant who continue to live there. There is nothing for me to walk out and see somebody, I'm like, "Oh, I know them from Atlanta," or I'm talking to someone, and they're from Atlanta and they live in Bed-Stuy now. Or coming to my house at a dinner party, and everyone around the table is from the South and have been here for various times, because what happens is everyone, "Oh, you should know my friend such-and-such. They're from New Orleans." Or then they come to town and said, "Oh, you should know my friend such-and-such. He's from Mississippi." So I created a community not only in the DIY scene, but in my personal life where my friends and people who also are part of my community are not in food and they're black.

Even now, and definitely in the very beginning, I would go to food events and I would be the only black person in the room and the only black woman in the room, and it became tiring. I'm not going to lie to you. Two reasons. Because I'm from the South and I still have a Southern accent, and I'm cleaning it up a little bit now, but most of the times, as I've gotten older, I just use my black vernacular because I feel like it's something that is—that you don't find many black people still use, so I use it because I feel comfortable and also to, I think—if I go and talk to my cousins that live in Athens,

they do not sound or speak anyway in black vernacular at all. So I started using that even more and not being ashamed of it. So that became not a thing, but just kind of like I just kind of felt different and just like, oh, I'm in these spaces all the time and I'm the only Southerner, I'm the only black person using black vernacular, I'm the only black woman, and people having all these crazy misconceptions about the South thinking that the only thing I know about is fried chicken.

So it did become tiring, and I think that like many times in my career, I've had to readjust and pivot and decide—I started deciding really early on that I'm going to stop going to so many food events. And I used to be on a lot of panels, oh, my gosh, panels and food events, and they would always kind of want me to talk about food and race and the black experience, and that became really tiring. And cultural appropriation, because I'm going to be honest with you, I was talking about that back in some of my early episodes. And so I just made a conscious decision that, "I'm happy to be on your panel, but just let's talk about something—let me talk about something else, or I'm good. I won't do it," because it just became tiring. And I stopped doing it, and then things just kind of shifted in terms of my work.

[0:57:18.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Do you want to write another book?

[0:57:21.8]

**Nicole Taylor:** I do want to write another book.

[0:57:23.8]

**Rien Fertel:** I don't know if you can say on the record what you want that book to be—

[0:57:30.8]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, yeah.

[0:57:30.8]

**Rien Fertel:** —but if you want to do that, yeah, or any ideas for future books or what you want your career to look like.

[0:57:37.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** Someone asked me that the other day, because I feel like I'm not having a midlife—maybe I'm having a midlife crisis, because I'm trying to figure out what's next for me, right? And someone—literally my friend who lives in Rome, who actually is a black woman from the South, who lives in Rome, has lived there over a decade—

[0:57:56.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Italy. Rome, Italy. **[Laughter]**

[0:57:58.6]

**Nicole Taylor:** Yes, Rome, Italy. And so we talk via WhatsApp all the time, so she said, “What do you want your life to be?”

I was like, “I'm going to get a career coach because I need to figure this out.”

And my response—and I haven't responded to her—was like I would love to, like, have a house upstate, have a house down South where I'm, like, growing my own flowers, growing my own food, and it's like a place where Southern folks, when they come in town, we can do dinner parties, we can gather, we can do retreats, because I feel like that's what me and my husband do all the time. We can host art shows there. Like a compound. That is like my big, big goal of, like, really creating this space where people gather, because I feel like that happens a lot in the food world, and either you're locked out of that or every now and then they let you peek in where people are like, "Oh, my gosh. Such-and-such has an annual New Year's party." And I've been fortunate enough to go to some of these things that are exclusive, but how can I create those own spaces for other people of color, you know what I'm saying, that's lush and cool, and if they want to come to New York because they're trying to get a book deal and they need somewhere to stay for five days, like, "Hey, come upstate. Stay up here. Let's roast a pig." That's like the big ultimate goal.

The short-term goal, what I want next, I toy with the idea of doing a breakfast book, and kind of like breakfast at home. I love breakfast. I feel like breakfast is so a part of the South, but everyone, every editor, every food professional has told me breakfast books don't sell, nor do brunch books sell.

So I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know what the book is going to be. Now, I have tested a bunch of recipes. I have some ideas, but not sure exactly what book number two—and writing a book is hard work. It's really hard work, and I know when I get into writing a book and trying to produce a cookbook, like, I can't do anything else

**[Laughter]** for, like, the whole year, right? Yeah, so, I have a few ideas, but that breakfast, brunch thing is really something I think is really a part of who I am.

[1:00:15.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Do you think you and your husband will ever move back down to Georgia?

[1:00:21.5]

**Nicole Taylor:** Oh, my gosh. I would be rich, every time I get that question. I don't know. The weather has finally broke here. It's like really for real spring, but kind of feels like summer, but like a month ago, it was like—I was like, “Oh, my gosh. Do I still want to be here?” I've been here ten years, ten years last month, and I don't think I had a vision for how long I would be here, but this city is—it's tough when you're a person from a foreign land. **[Laughter]** I mean, it's tough. Some days are tougher than others. There are some days where I don't want the hustle and bustle. I just want to, like, hear the crickets at night. I don't want to walk up four flights of stairs. Sometimes I want to get in a freaking car. Sometimes I want to go to the grocery store and not worry about how many bags I have to lug. So it gets really tough. And sometimes I don't want to explain where I am in my Southernness.

But ultimately I feel like I am privileged to be able to still be here. Like so many other Southerners that came here during the Great Migration, they stayed, they built families, so what's wrong if I stay here, you know? So I've kind of come to terms with I still can be connected to my home and still be connected to my culture and to my people and to my family, and, I mean, at this point, I've created a home here and a community.

So the long answer to your question is maybe. I don't rule it out, but I don't think the opportunities that I've had, and my husband, we wouldn't have these in the South. And the people that I've met, and just opening my eyes to different cultures and different people and different food. I don't know that I would have had that if I had stayed down South. Maybe. I'm not sure, though.

[1:02:22.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Well, I think that's a good place to stop, so I want to thank you so much for sitting down and talking.

[1:02:27.2]

**Nicole Taylor:** Thank you. My pleasure. Thank you.

[1:02:27.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Thank you.

**[End of Nicole Taylor Interview]**