

Barry Taylor
Bully's Restaurant – Jackson, MS

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Location: Warren County Public Library, Vicksburg, MS

Interviewer: Mary Beth Lasseter

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 29 minutes

Project: Bully's Restaurant

[Begin Barry Taylor Interview]

00:00:04

Mary Beth Lasseter: Hello; this is Mary Beth Lasseter with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Today is Wednesday, May 7, [2014] and I'm here in Vicksburg, Mississippi doing an oral history interview which is part of our Bully's Restaurant project.

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Could you please introduce yourself?

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Barry Taylor: I'm Reverend Barry Taylor and I'm a pastor in the City of Jackson as well as a Deputy with Hinds County Sheriff Department as well as a chaplain with Jackson Police Department.

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MBL: Can you please give me your date of birth?

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BT: September 8, 1951.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about yourself.

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BT: Well I'm a native Mississippian having been born in the Delta area of Mississippi, Belzoni, Mississippi, having moved to Jackson. My dad moved us to Jackson when I was five years old. I was reared in the Jackson Public Schools and I graduated Jackson State University, Wayne State University, and Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio. And so I come from a family of 18 sisters and brothers; all of us graduated college. We picked cotton, chopped cotton, and did whatever was—that was necessary to do to exist to help our parents.

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And so as a result here I am today and as I reflect back over my life God has truly blessed us.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about your parents and their background.

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BT: My dad ,who is now in heaven with the Lord, he lived to be 90 years old. He just died recently. Mom is 84 and she's a victim of Alzheimer's, as such as we call it. She's in a nursing home. But they came from humble beginnings out of Inverness, Mississippi and Belzoni and they partnered and married. And dad was a sharecropper in his younger years and then he moved us out of Belzoni—thank you Jesus in 19—56 and he came to Jackson, Mississippi. And while he was coming up he was the best friend of BB King, the great blues artist. They grew up together. BB King used to play guitar in my daddy's—they had a spiritual quartet and they noticed that every Sunday he would be asleep on the way to church. And they found out that he was playing blues up in Indianola on Saturday and Friday nights.

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And so he eventually left the group but BB King every time he came into Mississippi they would get together no matter when he came up until my dad's death. So dad came out of a singing spirit more or less and when he came to Jackson he took a job as a shipping clerk. And then he was called into ministry and then he pastored at least 10 churches in Jackson and the surrounding areas.

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And mom was a—as they call it a private home person who worked in the private home sector doing the maid type things. You've seen that movie with the maids, *The Help*, and it depicts how my mom came up. She would make \$15 a week and—but we made it on menial affairs. But the Lord was able and my dad being very talented as he was gave him a church and gave other little churches and then the members of those churches would give him food, corn, peas, etc. from the gardens and brought it home and it helped a lot. And we took the hand-me-down clothing where my mom worked from those people's children. And they would give it to mom and they would be like new clothes to us. So we wore it and exchanged clothing as we grew, passed it down; eventually God brought us through.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about the community where you grew up, what it was like then and what it's like now.

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BT: Well back then it was a community. I grew up in Georgetown my earlier years but then we moved to Shady Grove—Shady Oaks rather— part of Jackson, Northeast Jackson. It was a family-oriented community where everybody looked out for everybody. You shared what you

had as your—if your neighbor didn't have it and you had it you shared it with them and vice versa. That's the way it went. And everybody cared about each other and were concerned about each other. Your problems were our problems. And just in the reverse; so it was a very neighborly community back then.

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However, a lot of the older families have died out. The children have taken over the property. Like when my dad died, my brother moved into our home house and he keeps it up just as well as dad and them kept it up when we were—we were coming up. But it was more family oriented back in the day as we call it but now everybody is doing their own thing and you don't know your next door neighbor hardly because new faces have come into play and—and it was a more nurturing community when I was coming up, unlike it is today.

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MBL: Was this community close to the current location of Bully's Restaurant or how does it compare to the community surrounding Bully's Restaurant?

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BT: Well Bully's Restaurant was like the Piccadilly of today. It served the community. It—it was a popular restaurant—still is today, more so than it was back in the day because publicity and stuff is out and the media and all these kinds of things. So the son Tyrone, who is the—the uh, person who runs it now okay, his mom had that business. It was a family business and he worked in it then back when he was a young boy. And his mom—the Lord called her home a few years ago and Tyrone has done it—so everybody in the community they go to Bully's at least—at least two or three times in a month and I know I do myself. I don't care how I eat at these

other exquisite places, and all of the cuisines that they have I love to go back home to Bully's. I have to go there at least three times in a month because it's—it's uh, the food that brought us. And we never forget your roots, never. And so Bully's is a mainstay in the community as being and everybody is somebody. And nobody goes to Bully's.

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MBL: Do you remember your first visit to Bully's? Who took you or introduced you?

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BT: My daddy; that was his favorite shopping place. *[Interviewers note: Tyrone Bully's father owned a convenience store in the neighborhood and Barry Taylor is recalling that convenience store, not the present day restaurant.]* And so, he carried us over to Bully's and we would get the chitterlings and that's—that's—that's like a T-bone steak in the community to us. You know years ago, chitterlings were looked upon as the wing on a chicken used to be looked upon. Nobody wanted it. Now they're a delicacy. You know wings are the—is the going thing. And so chitterlings are too. And so they had every imaginable food that you could think of and it was a—it was a—you looked forward going to Bully's like Christmas was coming.

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MBL: Tell me about some of the dishes that you eat there today.

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BT: Neck bones, pig feet, pig ears, chitterlings, ham hocks, they have—of course they have the vegetables, the greens, the peas, the corn, the okra, the cornbread which is made from scratch

and would you believe it or not they still serve lemonade and Kool Aid. So it is—it is I mean he had—if you—if he ain't got it he will get it before you leave there. And they got the smothered this—I used to joke him all the time and I said Tyrone, I never understood why people call food smothered food. Smothered steak, smothered chicken, smothered pork chops; I said how can you smother something that's already dead? [Laughter] Smothering. And we joked about it and we always laugh about that but you're talking about the best cooks in town. There are other restaurants around him and around town in Jackson, and but there's none with greater cooks than Bully's.

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MBL: So do you find the food at Bully's so appealing because of the way it's cooked? Can you talk a little bit about that?

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BT: Yes ma'am; I'm somewhat of a—a cook okay. And mom—one of the things one of the prerequisites of coming out of mom's house before you went into the adult world as an adult was you had to go by the kitchen and learn how to cook, okay. And I'm a connoisseur of great foods okay, very tasty foods, and Bully's looked like they had the right ingredient and not just the main ingredient but the right ingredients to put right in the food and make you think you was right at your own house eating. So they—they specialize in satisfying the tastes of those who come and partake of that food.

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MBL: When I interviewed Tyrone Bully he was telling me about a woman named Ma Pearl, the neighbor who was really one of the first cooks for the restaurant. Did you ever meet her and if you did can you tell me about her?

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BT: Not only was she a great cook and the first that came in there, but she would always whip your behind if you got out of line. [*Laughs*] When they said Ma Pearl she was Ma Personified, universally Ma, neighborhood-ly Ma, she would whip your tail if you got out of line, and back then you could—if anybody's child got out of line them old folk would get you. And then they would go tell your mama they got you and your mama would get you all over again 'cause discipline was the order of the day when we were coming through.

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One of the things that our community believed in when we come—when we were coming up back in the day that was they believed in ownership, respect, and education. Those were the three main tenets of how we carried ourselves and it transcended down through the family. But nowadays if you whip somebody's child you might as well get ready for a lawsuit. You might as well get ready for a fight on your hand. And sometimes it graduates to more violence than that.

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MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about the people who eat at Bully's, the diners, both from the neighborhood, maybe from the government or the nearby recording studios? Talk a little bit about that scene.

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BT: Bully's like I told you, though small in size is—it's large, it's universally acclaimed in terms of the—the reputation it has for its good food. So therefore, people from all ethnic backgrounds, from all geographical locations, come to Bully's. If they come to Jackson, I mean they're entertainment groups and individuals and those who are in law and government and this kind of a thing, they come to Bully's and eat there. And there's a slogan that they have at Bully's, *don't go to heaven before you eat at Bully's because ain't no food in heaven as good as this food down here.* **[Laughs]** So Bully's has a great reputation.

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And you know what? It's been a mainstay so long because the reputation has never been marred or tarnished. You've heard of restaurants with they start out good and then something happens bad? His reputation at that restaurant and that restaurant is impeccable.

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MBL: Have you ever been in the restaurant when groups are meetings—political groups especially or have you seen political figures use it as a gathering place to address the public?

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BT: Yes, ma'am; they have. That's like a little springboard that they use to get it out whatever the message is. They go to Bully's; the news, TV stations, they're all there and that's what Bully's is like, the pulpit for the neighborhood to get the message out in terms of what they're trying to do and Bully's stands as a backdrop from which we came as people and where we are today.

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MBL: You've talked about growing up in Jackson. Can you talk a little bit about the Civil Rights Era there as you experienced it?

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BT: Yes, ma'am; I can. That's quite a memorable, challenging, unforgettable event or series of events. I was about seventh grade when we were living in the area of Bully's. I attended the then Brinkley Junior/Senior High School. I remember when Medgar Evers was living—we lived in the same community he lived in, the Civil Rights icon, the late Medgar Evers. My brother and I—my brother who has Dr. Dal Taylor, he's now Band Director at Jackson State University, he and I were Medgar Evers paper boys and the night he was assassinated it was our duty to go and throw papers the next morning and when we got to his house they had the crime scene taped around the place and then there was a—a rendering of his body drawn in chalk where he had lain or was slayed, or slain the night before.

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And a lot of history in that community, and we were—we were getting—we were going to do a rally. The whole school marched out the following day. It was like we got out of school June 6th I think; Medgar got killed June-something but it was in June. But we had a principal back then and our community was when black folk would squeal on other black folk we called them Uncle Toms. You've heard that saying before, and when we got together as a group to march out of the school and protest. Before we could get down to the walkway hardly a block away the principal had called the police. And the police were really, really mean. I mean one of the reasons I'm in law enforcement is because I want to help dispel that image and that persona about police and law enforcement.

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You'll never weed out those who bring their biases to work with them, so when you put this uniform on you should leave your biases at home because you're dealing with people in the public with real feelings and real ills and concerns in the community.

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One thing I love about our sheriff, Tyrone Lewis, he is a sheriff for all the people. And he don't discriminate, he's firm, he's fair, but we had some real brutal times. My brother's—older brothers and sister were Civil Rights workers back in the day. I remember the experience up in notwithstanding Byron De La Beckwith killed Medgar Evers, but then that experience up in Philadelphia where they just caught this guy. I forget his name, but at any rate, the three Civil Right workers that got killed up there but they got him in jail to this very moment. And the irony of it, the judge who sent us to him, Judge Henry Wingate was a school mate of ours at Brinkley High School and the Lord blessed him and he went onto to be a Federal Judge. And that man came before Henry Wingate. And he was so arrogant. But Henry Wingate gave him I guess as many lifetime sentences as he could get him. He'll get out of jail they will be making flying cars, you know but—but I'm saying; we had some terrible experiences in Jackson.

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There was a store called Glory Old Soul on Woodrow Wilson and then Whitfield Mills Road which is now called Martin Luther King Drive. Glory Old Soul had guard dogs and when we were marching in our freedom rallies up the street, Glory Old Soul loaned the Jackson Police their dogs to sic the dogs on us whereas they were in a predominantly black community and all of their business came from the community and they boycotted Glory Old Soul and it had to go out of business. So we went through a lot of things. My daddy pastored a church in Madison County, Mississippi. I don't know whether you know about that but that was a hell of a place for anything. Black blackberries even called it hard up there. **[Laughs]**

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And so he would have freedom rallies because it's the only place we could meet. We weren't allowed to meet in public places. The Masonic Temple and churches were the only place we could meet. And we had Caucasian sisters and brothers living with us in that day in our homes, which was taboo.

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And I never shall forget; we had a freedom rally at the church. I was about seventh grade. And we looked out and somebody was screaming and there was a truck pulled up with a group of guys on the back with the white sheets and the hoods and all of this and they stuck a cross into the churchyard and set it on fire. Well many people stayed and others ran off; you know they got frightened. They became frightened. And that night about 3 o'clock my daddy got a call and they had burned my dad's church to the ground.

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But thank God for the Jewish Defamation League out of New York. They rebuilt my daddy's church. So many nights, you know it was a lot of unsung heroes in that movement. Likened to Dr. King, Medgar Evers was the spokesperson that was out front so he was more visible. And he got a lot of attention. But there was a lot of unsung people who got hurt, maimed or killed in that. We didn't know from night to night whether my daddy would come back home alive. And he said one night they stopped him in the middle of the road up there in Madison. They had a roadblock and he had his hand on his gun and he was ready to go and one of the fellows recognized him and let him go on home.

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But so that Civil Rights Era was traumatic for a lot of people and it left an indelible mark in our minds and in our lives. So you know the good thing about it is—is that God brought good

out of evil. And thank God for Lyndon Johnson, Lyndon Baines Johnson, our President who succeeded John Kennedy. He was the person who made it all happen. The Kennedy brothers, though well loved by the black community and other minorities, they were afraid to tackle Civil Rights right head on. They were forced to do what they did but it was Lyndon Johnson who passed the Civil Rights, who helped pass the Civil Rights legislation that got us enjoying the fruits of—of the others—labors today.

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MBL: Do you see any groups or people at Bully's today who are working in modern day rights issues in the City of Jackson?

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BT: That's the place to be. Yes; I do. And they come there and they still carry on the legacy of the forerunners who came behind that. It's the place to be. Yes; I do see them and yes they still frequent that place. And the—the tradition is still carried on.

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MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about some of the staff members that you know who work at the restaurant? As a long-time customer I'd like to hear your descriptions of them.

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BT: *[Laughs]* I know all of them, every one of them, but they are so nice. I know Wanda; I know all of them. I can just go on the line with you but they're so nice. And the good thing about Bully's it sure is a good place to work for, let alone to eat; they don't have a large turnover of

employees. Miss Jackie, I mean she is—I mean she is—if—if Jackie if they lost Jackie they'd lose part of the—the tradition of that place and everybody treats you just like you're their sister or their brother. It's a kinship in there when you come in that place. And so Tyrone himself, Tyrone's family, his wife, his children, all of them work in there, but their mainstay, he has a good group of employees because he's a great guy himself, like people, like priests. So he's the priest, so the people follow the example of the priest which is a good one.

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MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about your role as a Reverend?

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BT: My role as a Reverend is I come from a lineage of preachers—my granddaddy, my daddy. I got four other brothers pastoring and preaching. Two of them in Arkansas; one who is a—was—he just retired as a Mayor there for 16 years and he also is a pastor. My other brother who is a pastor up at Jones Morris, the University town and then one brother pastoring in Jackson, which is my baby brother; another brother pastoring in Hattiesburg, and myself pastoring in Jackson. And then my—on Highway 18 and [Inaudible] Road, Teacher of the Faith Church, I have a television ministry that comes on TV three times a week. It's been television now since 2001 and going strong. We come on—it's on the Peg Network, Channel 18 on Comcast. Got to have Comcast; if you don't you can't get it, but at any rate—.

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And then my sister who pastors up in Belzoni, Mississippi and she's not only pastor but she is the proprietor if you will, CEO, owner of Mid-Delta Home Health and Hospice. She has 18 centers in the Delta and in Alabama, Arkansas, and Tennessee. She's one of the few multi-

millionaires in America. I'm so proud of her because we came up picking cotton, as I told you and chopping cotton and God has blessed her. She employs 700 people in the Delta and she—God blessed her to build a \$2 million home and it sits on 1,200 acres of land and she's got an elevator in the house and 20-some rooms. So all of us can go up there and stay. She has a movie theater in it about big as this in her house as well. So I'm proud of her. I'm not bragging about it. I'm telling you about the humble beginning, how if you take care of the Lord's folk he'll take care of you.

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MBL: As we wrap up this interview on Bully's Restaurant can you tell me what is your—what is one favorite thing—I'm sure there are several about that place, a story, a food?

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BT: I wish I could just target one but because of the vastness of its history and how such an elegant and marvelous place—it's a hole in the wall but we call it elegant because that's what we love. There are so many things I could point to. I would be unfair to myself if I confined myself to just one thing because there's so many good things. And that says a lot about the place; it says a lot about the people. Yeah; it's a multiplicity of things. Everyone you point out is good and great and so he cannot be put in a box because he is of a universal spirit, though he's a local, the spirit of that place and the tradition of that place far exceeds one thing.

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MBL: Is there anything that I have not asked you about that you would like to share with us?

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BT: You're—you're quite a gifted young lady. You—you don't leave no stones unturned and you certainly have done this in a very, very professional and knowledgeable way. And so you covered a lot of territory. I don't think you missed a thing and I certainly, certainly been blessed by this interview today.

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MBL: Well thank you for sharing your time.

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[End Barry Taylor Interview]