

GERALD PATOUT
Arnold LeDoux Library, Louisiana State University—Eunice, LA
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Interviewer: Sara Roahen, Southern Foodways Alliance
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[Begin Gerald Patout-1 Interview]**00:00:00**

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Wednesday, June 18, 2008. I'm in Eunice, Louisiana. I'm with Mr. Gerald Patout, and if I could get you to state your name how you say it and your birth date, and tell us your profession; I'd appreciate it.

00:00:19

Gerald Patout: My name is Gerald Patout. I'm a junior. I was born in New Iberia, Louisiana [on] February 23, 1950. I'm presently the Director of the Arnold LeDoux Library here at Louisiana State University at Eunice, and I just recently arrived here, being appointed in January of this year. For the last 10 years I was the Head Librarian at the Historic New Orleans Collection in the French Quarter.

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Fond of the Southern Foodways [Alliance] and all that they do and publish. We were members of the Southern Foodways Alliance at the Historic New Orleans Collection. So it's a delight to speak to them about my interest in food, food history, and--and what we're going to talk about today.

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SR: Thank you; we'll have to get you a membership here too. **[Laughs]** To start out, could you tell me a little bit about your family heritage? You grew up in New Iberia, Louisiana, but your ancestral line and your heritage?

00:01:21

GP: Right. I have a very interesting and I think unique ancestral line. **[Laughs]** My mother and father were both Patouts—distant cousins. My mother hailed from Lydia, Louisiana, which is just outside of New Iberia—Lydia Plantation—and her family are the sugarcane and sugar planter Patouts that currently and still own MA Patout and Sons Enterprise Plantation, considered today one of the oldest continuously operating American businesses, still in family hands. The Patouts came--the early Patouts came to Louisiana, that branch—well that started the Patout clan in Louisiana in 1825, Simeon Patout. And they were going to plant grapes actually and it didn't work out, so they got into the sugarcane business and the rest is history. And there's a book written about the Patouts and the history of the Patout family. Dr. Michael Wade at East Carolina University published a book called *Sugar Dynasty*. So there is quite a bit of archival information, family history about those early Patouts and their struggles in the cane business and how that business has grown to what it is today. So that's my family, my mother's side of the family.

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My father's side of the family was also related to those early Patouts but his relatives and descendants came from Patoutville to town, so to speak. And we would say town was New Iberia from Patoutville. And his grandfather, my father, Gerald Patout, Sr., was Felix Patout— Felix was his grandfather, rather, and his father was Frederic Patout. And Frederic Patout and some of his brothers owned the Hotel Frederic in New Iberia, which was a landmark on Main Street in New Iberia for many, many years. And like all downtown areas and the evolving cultural and Main Street landscapes of our small towns, the Hotel Frederic fell prey to the changing of the

Main Street and the interstate arriving and the four-lane further out of New Iberia and the location of other motels and chains. And so the Hotel Frederic went out of business, I think in the 1960s.

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In that capacity, my father and his brother, Eugene Patout, or Gene Patout, ran Gene & Gerald's Restaurant on Main Street in the Hotel Frederic for many, many years, which was a fixture of--of downtown New Iberia. And as a child it was sort of a--my learning laboratory that I began my interest in food and seeing how food is prepared, serving the Kiwanis Club and the Rotary Club and my grandmother hosting events in the Gold Room at the Historic—at the Hotel Frederic. She would have Garden Club parties and large, large events, and to see all of these events unfold and the catering and the food and the food preparation was really a learning experience for me.

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And from--from the Hotel Frederic experience I'm sure my taste-buds grew and my interest grew and I began my own career in various aspects of--in the academic world. And I earned a degree from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 1972, and then later pursued a degree in—an advanced degree in Education at the Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. And my first library job was in Colonial Williamsburg in Williamsburg, Virginia. And so that was a--a wonderful place in terms of historical resources to climb my library tree, and really I was a media specialist in a wonderful setting there. And my library career took off from there.

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I then pursued another library degree at Louisiana State University, an MLIS, and earned that in 1988. I continued my studies with an advanced library degree at Columbia University which brings me to the point of my story. My first food library job was in New York City when I—after I finished Columbia University I became the Head Librarian, Corporate Librarian, for Domino’s Sugar Corporation in New York, which was a remarkable experience for a person of my [*Laughs*] connections in Louisiana to the sugar industry. And it was an unusual experience also to couple with library work.

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The Domino’s Sugar Library at the research and development facilities in Brooklyn at the foot of the Williamsburg Bridge was fascinating; it was interesting; it was rich and full of wonderful resources on sugar. So as a son of the sugar industry and a student of sugar and food and food taste it was remarkable to be there and work with food chemists and engineers on products like non-sweet sugar and co-crystallized sugars and icing sugars. And so to me it was an extension of what I enjoyed and what I liked, so I didn’t really feel like I was actually doing library work—I was doing something that I enjoyed.

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After about four years in New York at the Domino’s Sugar Library I returned to Louisiana and I became--eventually became the Head Librarian at the Historic New Orleans Collection located in the French Quarter, which is again another one of these remarkable experiences that one has in a career. The Historic New Orleans Collection is a private foundation dedicated to the assets related to Louisiana and New Orleans history and culture, and food could not be a bigger part [*Laughs*] of New Orleans’ history and culture—as well as music, but food—. And so to bring my interest and expertise and enthusiasm for food at the Historic New Orleans

Collection was fun and it was enriching, and I had several remarkable opportunities to work on a food exhibit, food symposiums; collect--collect cookbooks and develop the cookbook collection, and began to really focus my energies on contacts in the New Orleans' food community—the Poppy Tookers, Susan Tuckers, and people that made contributions. I joined the Food Resources History Group with Susan Tucker and we began to work on a bibliography of New Orleans cookbooks, as well as a book that's I think almost published on the iconic foods of New Orleans. I was the research--one of the research persons in that endeavor feeding constantly the writers of the various sections information about red beans, or if there was a question about a specific Creole cream cheese or whatever I could do I would try to answer the questions based on my library background and the information that I had at my fingertips.

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Having completed that tenure at the Historic New Orleans Collection, after 10 years I returned home here to Eunice, Louisiana, and well, to--to Southwest Louisiana and Acadiana. And I've landed here at the LeDoux Library at LSU Eunice, as I've said, and I plan on continuing to expand the cookbook collection here at the LeDoux Library, determining exactly what we have, what we'd like to have in terms of Cajun cookbooks, and become the definitive Cajun cookbook repository in this area, which supports some very rich and interesting food traditions here in this part of Louisiana. And it's--it's a great time for me to take a look at these things and how the library can assist in--in promoting those traditions.

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SR: I don't even know where to start after that. There's so much. You've done so much. It's funny; it strikes me, you know when most people think of somebody who goes to school to be a

librarian—and you’ve done--you did a ton of schooling—they don’t necessarily think of food. But it seems like there’s a very natural connection.

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GP: Well I agree. I don’t think people really go to library school thinking about a particular subject or a subject expertise or even a specific type of library that they would like to work in. I knew at some point that I would enjoy working in a special library. I knew because of my background and love for food and because of the influence that my family had on me as far as museums or the Louisiana Sugarcane Festival or Tabasco Sauce, or all of those things that were important in our lives growing up in South Louisiana, that it would be wonderful to be a sort of specialist, an information specialist in that area, never dreaming that this path would take like the Domino’s Sugar Library into account—or never thinking that eventually I would end up as the head librarian at the Historic New Orleans Collection, which again gave me an opportunity to poke through some remarkable city directories, old pamphlets, wonderful menus, photographic collections. And so I guess it’s--it’s just been somewhat coincidence. **[Laughs]** And my desire to go from New Iberia to, say, Virginia and Colonial Williamsburg and then return and then go to New York and then come back here and then be in New Orleans with all of those cultural assets and then return home now. It’s sort of like taking a chance but at the same time sort of following a path of things that are pleasing to the palate, interesting to the mind and--and sort of a challenge.

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SR: Did you realize as a young person—you know when you were growing up around the hotel and--and you had people in your family who made a living around food—did you realize that that was an interest of yours, or was it just so second-nature that you didn't really think about it?

00:12:23

GP: I probably didn't—.

[Equipment failure.]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen of the Southern Foodways Alliance back with Gerald Patout. We had a little bit of a misfire with the recording device, but I'm going to start over with the last question, which was whether or not you think—I'm under the impression or the...I have the romantic belief that people in this area of the state and of the country still cook and eat together more than they do in other parts, and you were answering that question.

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Gerald Patout: Well I--I agree with you; I tend to think that this disintegration of the family and the family unit at the food table and at the dinner table has not taken hold quite as much here in Acadiana for a variety of different reasons. First of all this is a rural area and they're small towns in which family units make up the communities, and I think they're generally solid. I think these families do have distractions, and the same distractions that families in Chicago and New York and everyone else has: TVs and Internet and e-content and all of these other things that pull them away from the dinner table. And I also think these families have these new demands placed

on them from schools and achievements and accomplishments. And I think these families are also two-parent, working-parent families. But at the same time I think they struggle to get back to the dinner table here in French South Louisiana, because they're French and that was a custom and a tradition that the Creoles and the Cajuns I think both had, was to have dinner around the table or lunch and talk and that joie de vivre spirit of talking and story-telling was very important. So I don't think quite as many families are distracted by the external noises out there, but I do--I do think there are some that it's easier to roll through McDonald's or pick up a Subway or the pizzas and stuff like that. But I do think there are some families that continue to cook those dishes, or maybe simpler dishes that are easy to--easier to serve and provide family access to so that a good meal is in the home.

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SR: You talked a little bit; you mentioned some dishes that you remember from your grandmother. You mentioned—and from the restaurant: crawfish bisque, rice dressing, gumbo, ambrosia. Two questions: Could you sort of tell us what the menu was like at the Hotel Frederic as far as you remember, and then also were you able to get any of those recipes from your grandmother? Do you--do you have them?

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GP: My grandmother's cookbook, Miss Yvonne Patout Southwell, is actually the basis of Chef Alex Patout's Cookbook. So those were—and I don't want to be misquoted and I don't want to misunderstand, but I'm pretty sure that when that cookbook was produced, that was largely recipes from Alex and my grandmother Yvonne. So a lot of those are in there, and so dishes that

perhaps were at the Hotel Frederic for events--parties at Christmas time or whatever, some of those came from my grandmother.

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My--I do remember though besides eating at the hotel we would go to her home on Main Street, and it's--it was a lovely home, spacious and inviting. And [*Laughs*] as a child—I always tell the story—she would invite us in June when we would get out of school and she had a wonderful cook in the kitchen, Delores, who would fry chicken for us in June and it was the most delicious fried chicken you'd ever put your mouth on. And we would go there to eat that fried chicken, and there was not—there was no air-conditioning at that time in the '50s and the '60s. She had an air-conditioner in her room but there was no air-conditioning in this large dining room and we would eat that delicious fried chicken or those gumbos when it was—they were steaming and piping hot and it never bothered us one bit. And I think of today, again you have my reminiscences of today and today no one would ever eat fried chicken at lunch in an un-air-conditioned room anywhere [*Laughs*] and—or eat gumbo, piping hot okra and chicken gumbo. And so the food was so delicious and I remember that--that the heat and the humidity never seemed to affect us at all, but—.

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And now as far as the Gene & Gerald's Restaurant fare, I do recall that my father and them had daily menu specials. I think there was their editions of shrimp Creole, or adaptations of shrimp Creole, and chicken stews, and they smothered vegetables and they had all kinds of just wonderful dishes. And I would love to put my hands on an old Gene & Gerald's Restaurant menu. Okay, and I also remember that in the menu of course there was a typed daily specials that was added, because when I was in high school I would type that and run it off on the

mimeograph. And you know, you had your bread puddings and--and the traditional South Louisiana fare that you could find the in the restaurants at the time. And it's funny, when you engage people now and they ask you, *Gerald Patout, did your father have Gene & Gerald's Restaurant?* They say, *I remember eating there; I remember that delicious fudge cake, or, I remember those delicious biscuits in the morning that they had at their breakfast.* So I--you know there are all kinds of wonderful things and dishes and I--I do think my father like—. I remember someone asking him, Debbie Caffrey asking him about his fudge cake recipe. She said--she used to say, *Uncle Gerald, do you have that fudge cake recipe?* And I think he wrote it out for her and stuff like that from his memory and stuff like that. So those--those recipes are still available at different places; I'm not sure we can put our hands on them right now though.

[Laughs]

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SR: Do you ever cook out of Alex Patout's Cookbook? Does that taste like your family's cooking to you?

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GP: Yes, I do. I--I'm sure some of the recipes that my grandmother used and Alex used, and--and the way they got it down in there, are recipes we would cook to and use, and use for parties and stuff like that, uh-hm.

00:06:40

SR: What about, I'm curious now that you have sort of the perspective of someone who has worked a lot in New Orleans and studied--seen old menus and stuff—how do you think the food at a restaurant like your father's differed or was similar at that time in history from a comparable restaurant in New Orleans?

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GP: Well I think based on my--what I can remember about Gene & Gerald's and my experiences after I left New Iberia and grew up, my father and his brother Gene and what they cooked tended to use the local provisions and what they had on hand from New Iberia, all the area. If there was fresh corn they cooked maque choux, the corn dish, based on the fact that corn was coming in during the summer. And if they were doing oyster dishes, it was generally months that it was cold and those oysters that were fried or made in oyster stew were--and they were fresh and they could get them from a fresh--someone providing them fresh to them.

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The same thing with fresh shrimp—easy to get in New Iberia, so all their Creole dishes, their Shrimp Creole dishes, or any of the--the dishes that they had, the ingredients were generally fresh. Soft-shell crabs, if they could get that from a provider then they would put that on the menu. The same thing with okra; peas--beans, field peas, and so all of the yams, all of those kinds of things were fresh provisions. But at the same time I think my father and them, they were not experimenters. They used traditional recipes that perhaps they got from their mother or their cooking training. My father had gone--my father went to training at Delgado and I remember he always used Wenzel's Menu Maker to enlarge menus and cooking, so he had some basic tools and reference books that guided him to cook in his style.

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And I say that they weren't experimenters, my father in particular, because I noticed that today's nouvelle Creole and Cajun cuisines use a lot of creams and butters and sauces and I don't think that it—in the time that I remember eating in New Iberia at Gene & Gerald's Restaurant that we had so much of that nouvelle. We had just what was happening at the time, the cuisine of the time. And I think nouvelle and these--these new chefs today have added some of their techniques perhaps from reference books or their cooking schools to these rich--this rich palate of ingredients—the creams, the sauces, the stocks—and I think it's enhanced what the 1950s and '60s players were doing out there in the local restaurants. And that's just my observation on that.

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SR: Okay, do you think that—well, let me just ask you this: When you look at the cookbooks of Paul Prudhomme or eat his food, does that resonate with you?

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GP: The ingredient palate, the techniques and--and of course some of the names and the way things were done. Now when things get added to fundamental dishes like Creole dishes or like maque choux with corns and crabmeats and all that, those were not things that we were accustomed to and those basic dishes that we had in New Iberia. That's not to say they're good or bad, but we did not enjoy those things. I mean like, I don't remember corn and shrimp soups or those kinds of things; those kinds of things seem to me to have come later and have been the—and have evolved as the palate and experimentation have come together with the ingredient palate and with these chefs who are trying to develop a name for themselves and their

restaurants. And of course when my father and them were growing up we didn't have the media [*Laughs*] and we didn't have the attention focused on them quite as much in New Iberia, even though New Iberia was the hottest, saltiest and sweetest little town in America, with the salt—Morton's Salt—the Tabasco people and the sugar people.

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We had attention but not nearly the--the heat and glow of those lamps from the media when Paul Prudhomme and our Emerils and all of the other chefs have taken to the stage.

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SR: What about when when you go to family functions now in and around New Iberia? Have you seen that sort of nouvelle—you know, certain nouvelle techniques making their way into the home?

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GP: Well I, within my own family I could speak to this quite recently [*Laughs*] because I was with my cousins, Alex and--and his sister, Gigi, as my younger sister Elmira remarried in Patoutville a couple weeks ago. Gigi did the catering, and Alex, and her family assisted in--in the foods and preparations and did a marvelous presentation. But one of the things I have to sort of chuckle at is that on the--on the menu that evening, Gigi—it was a Mexican/Spanish flair but Gigi did some crawfish enchiladas as one of the courses. [*Laughs*] And so--and I've heard her speak of that, but I had never had them until two Saturday nights [ago] and they were absolutely delicious. And I think--and again I'm not sure, but I would have to ask her, I think she got this recipe from a chef, colleague, friend in New Orleans on how to make these. And they were

absolutely delicious. So you see an assimilation and you see an introduction of a dish into the Patout family at a--at an event and it was really, really tasty and really good. So I think it's interesting to see these changes and how you can pull from other cookbooks, other associations and relationships with cooking friends and add it to the Patout cooking palate.

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SR: That is really interesting. I wanted to go back for just a second; you said earlier that it was easy to come by shrimp in New Iberia. And can you just say, for the record, why that is?

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GP: Well first of all my father and his brothers were all big sports-hunters-fishermen-type people. So when he finished his shift in the afternoon at 2 o'clock, if he worked in the morning and the lunch, he was a wonderful father in that he would put us on the boat that he had out in the country and we would go out to Weeks Bay and we might drop some crab lines or we would even do some trolling in Weeks Bay for fresh shrimp ourselves. And as a child, again I thought that was the most wonderful thing to pull that shrimp troll even though those troll boards were heavy. **[Laughs]** You--we pulled up a catch in the afternoon with fresh crabs and shrimp and fish that, I mean we would go home and--and enjoy immensely. Now, and then my father had all these fishermen contacts and friends and he—you could buy shrimp at, well Cypremort Point or around New Iberia, fresh shrimp, when they were running or they were in the Bay, so he knew when to--to buy and who was selling and how fresh they were. And I mean it's almost like, you know knowing when the soft-shell crab, the--the actual crab was going to aestivate its shell. **[Laughs]** You could pinpoint it on those moonlit nights on Weeks Bay, so it was very interesting

to be there at the moment, to--to not only be on that boat pulling that shrimp troll up but to buy these provisions.

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SR: So I recently moved back to Louisiana after having spent a year and a half in Philadelphia and for me, unexpectedly, shrimp was—Louisiana shrimp or Gulf Coast shrimp—was what I missed the most. It was pretty intense. When you moved away to, like, Williamsburg and--and New York, did you take your food culture with you? Did you—how did you work with that?

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GP: Yeah, I did. Actually I'll tell you two little various stories. When I moved to Williamsburg I don't think I missed it quite as much because Williamsburg—in Virginia I lived in Virginia Beach, so I lived right at the--I lived at the seashore so I was able to get shrimp and we were able to enjoy Chincoteague oysters in Virginia. And they had crabs and crabmeat and food in Virginia was delicious and tasty, and--and I remember eating in Williamsburg, particularly at the Williamsburg Inn, and it doesn't get any better than that. So my food experiences in Williamsburg, I don't think I missed Louisiana quite as much. But I did share my techniques and cooking with my friends in the apartment complex I lived in—gumbos and we made things, and they always talked about how much they loved how I cooked.

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But then when I moved to New York, that was a different story and I did miss it. But working at the Domino's Sugar refinery in research and development, what brought me home every day was the fact that when I got there, as you sort of approached the research and

development at the foot of the Williamsburg Bridge there, that odor of brown sugar being unloaded from barges—see there was a refinery there in New York [and] that odor brought me back to Patoutville in South Louisiana. And when I would go into the building you would--you would smell them. You would smell the food chemists downstairs doing something with sugar or--or cooking it, so that brought me back in that sense.

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But I'll also tell you a funny story. When I--when I got to New York and I was enrolled in Columbia University and I worked at Teachers College I needed a little extra money. So I offered to teach a Cajun cooking class for the Learning Annex in New York, which is one of these large continuing education magazine-driven educational enterprises that people can take leisure learning classes all over the city of New York. And they said, *Well send in a resume*, and--and I told them who I was and that I could teach people how to cook gumbo and pralines and make jambalaya, and they hired me. And I taught cooking classes at the Yellow Dot Studios on 33rd near Macy's for several sessions, taking my provisions up to 33rd—I lived on the Upper West Side—on the subway. I would have all of these wonderful provisions like sliced sausage and brown sugar and--and chicken cut up in little bags to bring to Yellow Dot Studios. **[Laughs]** And I was always concerned that maybe one of the--the homeless **[Laughs]** riding the subway might attack me for my Louisiana provisions before I got to Yellow Dot Studios, so—. It was fun and it was a successful class; most of the time people enjoyed it a lot and I was able to--to give them a sense of how to make a roux and some of the basic ingredients in a--a gumbo and also show them how to make microwaved pralines. Because of course cooking pralines, there's a recipe in a lot of the cookbooks, the--the newer cookbooks on how to make pralines using your microwave with one stick of butter and I forget the exact recipe. But that was fun, and--and

largely each time these would turn out. They would—you could roll them out on the waxed paper and they would sit and get hard. So it wasn't a flop. But it was an interesting way to present Cajun or Creole cooking in New York City.

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SR: I'll have to try that. Did you get sausage and things like that from Louisiana for those classes or—?

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GP: No, I bought it up there. You know the various types of sausage that seemed to be—what we were accustomed to and things like that. And of course rice and chicken were available so you had the basics, but not the fresh provisions like you could draw out of Weeks Bay. **[Laughs]**

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SR: Well let me—I have so many questions but I'll ask you—you've answered a lot before I even had to ask them. Let me ask you about boudin.

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GP: Okay.

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SR: Was boudin a part of your childhood?

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GP: I remember boudin—as a child growing up in the country—that there would be available links of boudin and I’m not actually sure that I enjoyed it. Again, you asked me about whether I enjoyed something as a child or more--remembered something more as a child. I do remember that we had it with hogshead cheese that was made in the country, and I don’t think I enjoyed it as much--as much as I do now. And again my beginnings in tasting boudin, the interest was in the fact that it was a rice dressing, and a rice dressing put in casing. And again my experiences with rice dressing were the rice dressings that my two grandmothers made and were served at Christmastime or dinners and stuff like that. So if it was a good rice dressing then I really enjoyed it.

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SR: Could you explain for the record what rice dressing is, and also how your two grandmothers’ rice dressings differed?

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GP: I--the rice dressings were sort of the carbohydrate staple at our meals, one of those offerings that was of course fundamentally made of rice. Now in terms of rice I remember there was--there were no rice cookers as a child. I remember they cooked rice in a pot and—white rice—and the process for cooking the rice dressing was pretty simple. It was ground beef and pork that was cooked together in--in a gravy. And I’m sure there was stock—onions, bell peppers, the trinity cooked down, and I do remember also in my grandmothers’ rice dressings that the chicken gizzards, chicken livers, and the necks were boiled in another pot, a separate pot

and that could have been done before too, and sometimes that stock in that pot was poured into the cooking pot of ground beef and ground pork. And I always heard them talking about that it was--it was tasty to have half and half. If you could get ground pork, that was good too because it made for a good match, good flavor and good taste. And so I've always kind of adhered to that myself. I--I make rice dressing with just ground beef, but if you can get half ground pork and half ground beef, then that was what my grandmothers did. And then of course they cooked that down and then when it got to a certain consistency—and as a cook you kind of know when it's time to start to adding the rice—you spooned the rice in and they would mix it. But--but a little bit before that they--I do know that they would chop the chicken livers, a little bit of the gizzards, and they would—the neck, the meat that was on the neck would be pulled off and it was also very tasty and it was chopped very fine, very, very fine, and a certain amount of it had to be added; not too much, particularly because it would get too much of that flavor of the gizzard or the liver. And--and the neck meat was also very important because it added a special flavor. And that was added into the ground beef and the cooking pork. And so then all of these things were brought together in a pot and then mixed nice together with a consistency that was—it adhered and it had a wonderful odor. And then I always remember sort of the crowning ingredients were onion tops and parsley were sprinkled in there.

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And of course during this time of adding all these things into a pot, and where the seasoning was going on, and I suspect it was your traditional red pepper, salt, and--and black pepper. And then throughout the years I guess I was paying more attention. I listened to them say, *Well we don't add as much black pepper; we use white pepper instead of black pepper.* And you know different people add spices and seasonings, but those were the primary seasonings that

were added. And I think if I recall sugar--a little bit of brown sugar was always sprinkled in there too as an enhancer--flavor enhancer. A little bit of sugar. And I don't remember the exact proportions because the pots varied and the sizes and the amounts they were cooking.

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The only thing I can say about the differences in my two grandmothers' cooking is, again, my grandmother in the country at Lydia Plantation had her own style so to speak, and she did a lot of the cooking herself. I know that there was help but I don't remember—I remember her managing the cooking, more doing the cooking; and in town, my grandmother in town had help in the kitchen that--that were cooking these dishes and stuff like that. She would be overseeing working with that person, so if there was any differential it would be--be that, but largely the tastes and the flavors—. And I do remember that both my grandmothers were very friendly and complimentary and they loved each other's cooking, and when they were together they would talk about Cousin Myrtle's hogshead cheese, or my grandmother in town made wonderful Christmas candies and cookies and sweets and things. So they had different skills and expertises, but they did appreciate one another and I know they talked about it, you know, and their foods and how they prepared [them], so they probably picked up from one another their tips on how to make divinity or Russian rocks or rice dressings or things that they did—chow-chow. My grandmother in the country—or hogshead cheese and patés and things like that.

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SR: What is Russian rocks?

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GP: It's a sort of Christmas candy; it's not like fudge and I forget the exact recipe, but I--I remember that's one of those kinds of Christmas--Christmas candies. And I think it might use not Pet Milk as much as the—the sort of sweet—

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SR: Sweetened condensed?

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GP: —condensed milk, exactly. I think but those—date loaves. There was all those kinds of Christmas—I can remember my grandmother in town used to make sugared citrus like orange and lemon and she dried them out and they would be nothing but sugar all over them. You never see that kind of stuff anymore. Divinity—they'd made divinity on a cold day because it would set better and they would whip it a certain way and they had techniques and things and those strategies were really, really important to make. And that dish, that candy, that salad with tomato aspic would come out a certain way and--and they, you know, had those little tricks.

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SR: So in your vocabulary, is there a difference between rice dressing and dirty rice?

00:26:25

GP: Not really. I mean I wouldn't draw that distinction. I mean I think if you're going to make a dirty rice, that's probably just a real quick rice dressing—to me—and you wouldn't have these other ingredients. You might not have pork; you might not have the chicken livers or gizzards

or—and other people add different things, so I would think dirty rice is just kind of like that gravy with the meat in it. You could put a little onion tops and parsley on it and it--and it looks kind of dirty, but it's very tasty. And rice dressing takes a little bit more strength, a little bit more pizzazz, a little bit more work to it and stuff like that. And then when of course you put good rice dressing in a casing, people call that boudin. And then you know they--they take that in different directions too.

00:27:09

SR: When you were younger, growing up, in what context would you eat boudin—do you remember?

00:27:15

GP: It was generally sort of like an appetizer. I don't recall eating boudin as a meal, but that's just me. It was there out on maybe the stove and people would cut a piece, and it was in the afternoon if I remember correctly in--in terms of a time period. I don't remember eating boudin in the morning, and maybe other people do but that--that's the context in which we we had it at my grandmother's. And it could have been--and it could have been an appetizer at a party and stuff like that. Or, I kind of remember that.

00:27:51

SR: Do you think that the boudin that you had at your grandmother's was homemade or do you think she purchased that?

00:27:56

GP: I think she actually purchased that. I don't recall her making boudin, although they made sausage in the country and they had a smokehouse in Lydia. I cannot say that I recall my grandmother's boudin but I do know she made hogshead cheese; they made cracklings, and as I say chow-chow and things like that. And I would have to check with my mother and them to ask if--if my Grandmother Patout in Lydia made boudin.

00:28:23

I always kind of thought it was bought from somewhere, the boudin, but that's just—a local friend or someone that she knew or whatever.

00:28:33

SR: Do you remember seeing red boudin or blood boudin?

00:28:36

GP: I do not. I only remember it later when it was introduced or—I don't remember that as a child.

00:28:46

SR: What about, do you remember seeing it at service stations like it is—like you see it these days—or for retail sale?

00:28:53

GP: I don't. I don't remember seeing it at—you know I only remember first being introduced like at the meat specialty places in New Iberia and someone talking about, you know, that there's blood boudin available. And you know I thought—and maybe I was into my 20s when that was discussed. I don't remember that as a child or even as an adolescent. Again my food events were more about the things that I've talked about, the shrimp and those kinds of things, and boudin was kind of later. And I do remember seeing it at my grandmother's, but never you know blood--blood boudin. **[Laughs]**. Sort of like I never really realized the concept of blood oranges either. And so you know how you--and you learn things, your repertoire of picking up knowledge. I don't really think I paid attention to the fact that there were blood oranges until the Food Network or maybe when I lived in New Orleans and--and they said, *Down the Mississippi River you know that there's a certain kinds of oranges called a blood orange*, and then I started seeing these things appear on menus—the blood orange. So it's--it's funny how words and descriptors of certain foods can come from a certain area and you don't know about them until you're either there or they evolve in stuff like that. So the blood boudin thing was sort of new for me.

00:30:13

SR: What about as a—I mean either from your experience being from here or as a scholar and a librarian, what is your understanding of the origins of Cajun boudin?

00:30:26

GP: My understanding is--is at this point **[Laughs]** pretty shallow in that it's not like some of the other things that I've studied and addressed—cookbooks—and I would like to know more about it. But having said that, I would think that the origins of boudin here in Southwest

Louisiana are predicated on the fact the ingredients were here in this area with the right groups of people, the ethnic groups of people coming together. You had Germans here in Southwest Louisiana at Roberts Cove that made sausage and so you had the casing or the ability to make sausage. You have rice and you had rice formers. Let's not forget that, you know, you had Native Americans in this area. You have the French. It's what made New Orleans Creole, all of these ethnic groups, and I think the same contingent of contributing factors reside here in Southwest Louisiana, the same influences, the ingredient palate, the ethnicities, the--the ability to get to these ingredients and then putting them together in a way like the rice dressing and putting it in a casing. I think that's how boudin evolved, but that's not--not based in fact. I will get there one day. Now that I'm in the heart of this area to--to ask more questions, to find out from more people and to do the type of research that I need to do. But based on what I know about jambalaya—and I wrote a little article on jambalaya for the Spanish Society and gave a little presentation when I was in the Historic New Orleans Collection—and--and how jambalaya evolved and rice came to Louisiana. I think you can use the same model of research that developed that dish from paella in Spain to jambalaya here in Louisiana—with the African Americans, the Spanish, the French all contributing some kind of way to that dish. And then here in Southwest Louisiana you have the same kinds of things coming together, the need to enjoy food and--and the ingredients that you have here and the fact that, as I said, I think the Germans and the sausage makers played an important role in probably bringing the casing to the introduction—would be my guesstimate.

00:32:50

SR: Well that's--that's very helpful actually. What about your experience with boudin now? You've moved back to this area—how often do you eat it and in what context?

00:33:06

GP: Well I--I'm not a boudin eater every day. Every once in a while I'll pick up a--a piece or a link, or if I'm having company for wine and cheese [*Laughs*] I'll pick up some boudin, but it's all experimental for me since I've only been here since January. And I keep asking questions as to where's the—to get the best boudin, because I think when you invite people over or you entertain your own family or your own palate it's all—I love to know where is the best of this or that. And so I keep asking questions around here in Eunice and stopping here there and yonder, and we'll taste and determine eventually which one I really like the best. So I'm getting there but I'm not there yet.

00:33:54

SR: Did you have, or do you have ongoing any kind of culture shock? Even though you're from this area you lived, you know, in other parts of the country and then in New Orleans for a long time.

00:34:06

GP: Actually I don't. I--I think it's for a variety of different reasons. I guess I was so accustomed to the way I grew up and was aware of the people and their cultural aspects and assets that that doesn't shock me. What has been really pleasantly surprising and--and really nice is to be back in Acadiana particularly after post-Katrina New Orleans. I think New Orleans is

undergoing a lot of change and there's a lot of challenges and I am glad to be back at home where it's comfortable. It's less threatening at the same time to be immersed in this rich cultural milieu that surrounds me.

00:34:57

It's where I grew up; it's the kinds of things that I know about and they're readily accessible. You don't have to work real hard at it; people are real friendly. They're effusive in--in their information and in terms of culture, the music, and the food here. So it's really good to be back in that arena and--and to work with my people on my interest in, now, preserving that. You know particularly here at LSU Eunice, the--the 2008 Homecoming for the alumni is going to be featuring food preservation and me developing the cookbook collection and interest along those lines. So that's really nice to be received that well and to be able to introduce my own interests here in--in this community.

00:35:46

SR: That's been my experience too. I couldn't find the library right away and I had people swarming me to try to help me figure out where it was. People are very friendly.

00:35:57

GP: Yes, people are very friendly. And a particular note, the students and the faculty in the community here in Eunice are very, very nice, very supportive, very interested in the library and what we have, and so I think as I get more experienced and--and more into this, it will be equally as nice and appreciative.

00:36:22

SR: This might not be a question that you can answer yet, but what is—do you have an impression on what—how did I phrase this when I wrote it down? —what boudin means to the people in this area; how important it is to day-to-day life?

00:36:42

GP: Well I think--I think it's like music or anything else. It's--it's a cultural symbol for them; it represents what's good about their daily routines and their lifestyle. And I say that because even on a sort of tangential way, [*Laughs*] some of--some boudin is not necessarily the traditional boudin. Someone was telling me about a crawfish boudin that's being made and sold and stuffed into a casing. And so in an endearing way, if they're putting crawfish into boudin—the crawfish and rice and all of these things are--are so important to the culture here, and so to put it into and to be a part of boudin, which is something that most people love, must be a symbol of--of something good and that tastes good and that feels good. So that's what I think is important to the culture. And so--and they also combine boudin with fun things, events and--and music and all these things feel good together and are good about the culture and positive. And--and so, and it speaks to the history of how this has evolved and stuff, so I think that's all really, really positive.

00:38:05

SR: What about, can you tell us a little bit about the different boudins that you've tried in this area—the places and—?

00:38:11

GP: I've actually only tried the--the boudin at the slaughterhouse [Eunice Superette & Slaughterhouse] and I have not tried [**Laughs**] any of the blood boudin. And I think I picked up a link at T-Boy's [Slaughterhouse] right there on Maple Street, which also makes cracklings. Somebody recommended that and I picked up a—they were all very good and tasty. Some of it was spicier and hotter than others and I--I would prefer it not to be red-hot and peppery hot, but tasty.

00:38:46

SR: Have you tried Bubba Frey's?

00:38:48

GP: I have not tried Bubba Frey's, and I have to get over to— [**Laughs**]. Bubba Frey is going to be on the LSU-Eunice Homecoming Program and he will start the program over at the National Park Service, and I understand he is quite a--a character and speaker and promoter of his boudin. So I need to stop down LA-13 one day and go in and introduce myself.

00:39:09

SR: He's a boudin ambassador I think. [**Laughs**] Another question you may or may not have an answer to: I find it really interesting that a lot of Cajun food culture has trickled into New Orleans at least a little bit, made its mark. Boudin hasn't really, for the most part. I--visitors often want to try boudin and I tell them they need to come out to Cajun country. Do you have any ideas about why that might be the case?

00:39:43

GP: I don't know; it's sort of like the cracklings either, or you know there are a few dishes that simply have not made it in--into New Orleans. And I don't know whether people associate boudin with a certain class of people, a certain group of people, and it's a stereotypical type thing. But you're definitely right having lived in New Orleans and certainly appreciating the food culture there. It's not one of those kinds of things that you find on a--a menu or you go to a cocktail party, whereas around here in Southwest Louisiana it--it is cocktail party food or served readily as an appetizer or things like that. And again I'm—you know I would be speculating; on my part I'm not sure whether it's—maybe they feel like it's hard to make, and I don't really see it that--you know that way. I mean it's a sausage in a casing, rice dressing in a casing, so I really don't know what it is but that certainly is an interesting question, worthy--worthy of further studying and pondering. *[Laughs]*

00:40:58

SR: So I'm curious—because if I take boudin back to New Orleans there's no end of people who want it, so there's definitely interest. And I'm curious about how you--how you go about serving it in a cocktail party atmosphere?

00:41:10

GP: We always, or I've served—where it would be cut into small slices and there would be a toothpick placed in it, and that little piece that was cut would hold together, and--and that's the way that I've seen it served at cocktail parties. Sometimes there's no toothpicks and there's

napkins next to a serving dish and people pick up a link. Now I've also served in sort of a very country style on a wooden board with a knife next to it and people cut their own piece off a link, and there are small plates to--to serve with it, and again napkins, to be—to be eaten with the fingers.

00:41:50

The--the other—

00:41:52

SR: So you cook it and then cut it?

00:41:52

GP: Right, yeah, and I know that probably a lot of times it's—in catering events and served—it's left in rice cookers behind the scenes and then brought out onto trays. To keep it warm they put it in rice cookers because of course a rice cooker keeps the rice wonderfully well ready to serve, and--and so that's a good device to use for that.

00:42:23

SR: That brings me to just--to a non-boudin rice-related question. When you were growing up, I'm wondering if you ate--ever ate brown rice?

00:42:32

GP: I--I don't recall eating brown rice. I think it's only in these [*Laughs*] where we have the health-conscious promos, and we're trying to lower our carbohydrates and our carbs, that we

move into the brown rice. And I do remember that when the Conrico rice store in New Iberia started selling their various rice products—again it’s sort of like the blood boudin and the blood orange that brown rice was something that came to my knowledge and attention, and--and as you evolve you pay more attention to it. And I’m sure there’s specific dishes that call for brown rice that are different than others. But we always ate white--white rice.

00:43:13

SR: What about sugar? Since you’re a sugar family, did you usually eat the sugar when it’s—when it was brown or white?

00:43:23

GP: We ate the sugar mill; we still do. We have brown sugar and it, to me, is the only way to go. [*Laughs*]

00:43:31

SR: Can a pedestrian get her hands on that?

00:43:35

GP: I know that the--that would be a wonderful market and I know lots of people ask for it and we--we share when we can. I think one of the problems with it when it comes directly from the mill is that it’s--that sometimes it’s not completely purified and that there might be some--something in there that you would want the general public or the—you know with the litigious society that we live in today, that you wouldn’t want someone to get. Sometimes it’s kind of

syrupey maybe and a spot--a big ball of molasses—I know, and things like that. So they don't generally do that but I actually thought--I think there's a huge market for them to sell to Williams-Sonoma and to specialty stores—Patoutville brown sugar. And I've in fact met with the Williams-Sonoma people last year as they were producing a Louisiana products catalog; they came to the Historic New Orleans Collection for images and I think we talked with them about the possibilities of product—brown sugar product and generic brown sugar. I think that people are looking for like whole foods; those markets--organic markets, and this is--this is before it goes to the refinery. This is as good as it gets.

00:44:49

SR: Yes, it's like an artisanal product.

00:44:55

GP: Exactly, exactly, and if they could somehow in the refining process or the milling process get it to that point where it would meet the standards and the accreditation that needs for those health standards, I think it would be—. Again it's a niche market and that--that's possibly where they ought to be headed in the direction of looking at those markets.

00:45:13

SR: I doubt anyone in your family ever got sick from that sugar or you wouldn't be eating it.

00:45:17

GP: If they did they wouldn't talk about it. *[Laughs]*

00:45:21

SR: Oh, how is this area different than it was when you were growing up in Acadiana?

00:45:29

GP: Well of course I mean it mirrors like some of the changes that—there's--there's been a lot of growth in this particular area and I think people—since the hurricanes people are moving away from the coast. And I think people are more cognizant of the effects of hurricanes, and I mean just technology has sped up the production of--of the sugar business and the refine--the milling business, the cane business. So you see technology in the fields and at the mills. So not only in your homes and--and stuff like that. So I think it's--it's grappling with how to integrate these technologies and daily lives and keeping life simple like it was in the '50s and '60s before we had all of this attention on our cuisine and our music and stuff like that. I think people would like it to be--like their lives to be simple and easy and accessible and have these wonderful foodstuffs and food products at the same time with a lot--with not a whole lot of traffic and not \$4 a gallon gasoline and all those kinds of other things that distract us and make us weary and concerned. So I think that's what--what we see. But they're trying, they're thinking of these things, but they would like--they like the way of life that it was around here.

00:47:02

SR: Yeah, it's difficult. I mean it's—people around here have big trucks for a lot of good reasons but that's--that's a hardship at this point.

00:47:10

GP: Exactly and I notice that myself too. I was making a remark that I've never seen so many people driving around in big trucks at \$4 a gallon and a lot of young people too. And I don't know whether it's the rural nature or it's a status symbol or it's a cultural symbol but times have changed. And that's why it's so important to talk about food preservation and preserving these things that are cultural icons of--of Southwest Louisiana and not let some of these other materialistic symbols take us over and--and we lose our cultural identity, or it becomes adulterated and someone else takes it over and--and makes money on it or--or profits by it or whatever it may be.

00:48:04

SR: Well that—I don't want to keep you much longer because you've given me so much time, but I just want to ask you a little bit about gumbo, you know which fits into the discussion a little bit. First of all, as a scholar and a historian, I'm sure that you're asked on occasion to define gumbo or define its origins, and I'm wondering what you say when that happens.

00:48:38

GP: Well I think that's really difficult to answer but at the same time I'll harken back to the answer that I gave you about jambalaya because I think the fundamentals of our cooking originate in the ingredient palate and the ethnicities and where we're located in time--in time and space. And I say that because I mean I've been on a panel with Dr. Jessica Harris, who talks about the origins of gumbo and—at the Symposium in New Orleans—and has written many, many wonderful cookbooks and is the historian of record when it comes to answering where

gumbo comes from and its African routes, its Caribbean influences, and how this all—and the rice from the Low County in South Carolina to the rice in Louisiana, how all of these various influences, the people and the ingredients, have gotten here to Louisiana and at what point in time they have arrived here and been a part of the local landscape. When they all got together and they crossed paths, some threw in the pot sassafras, some made the roux a little different, some added ham, some added shrimp. And what you have then is gumbo with a lot of different explanations on how to get to that point of it tasting so good. And now you can emphasize the use of stocks—seafood stocks for a seafood gumbo: boiling fish heads and--and fish bones to come up—and--and shrimp peelings—to come up with a wonderful powerful tasty shrimp/seafood stock to add to a seafood gumbo. Or you can add chicken stocks to your chicken and sausage and shrimp gumbos, and of course you--you boil chicken bones and necks and wings and add your onions and celery and any other flavorings and you get a marvelous basis there. And then you make your roux based on the recipe that you have at hand from your grandmother, your great-grandmother, or something passed down. So again, how you explain this is all based on a lot--a lot of different factors at a lot of different times, and I think you have to recognize all of these. You have to recognize African American, you have to recognize the French, you have to recognize the Creole French, the Caribbeans, the Cajuns, Cubans, all of the various ethnic influences that have arrived from Saint-Domingue to France to Canada here in Louisiana, along with the Native Americans who were here first. And there's wonderful pictures and research about the--the Chitimachas or the Atakapa Indians being here and what they did in their foodstuffs. So they had a contribution and got it started. So all of these things fit together, and--and the sum total of that is this gumbo, thickened stew with roux, and all these ingredients and lots of people stirring the pot and adding ingredients.

00:51:55

SR: Thank you. What about yourself—if you make a gumbo, what style do you--what style do you associate with sort of your comfort food?

00:52:04

GP: I like to make a chicken and sausage gumbo very much and I take my time and I make my roux in a black iron pot that's well-seasoned; the pot is well-seasoned and been cooked in, and I take my time slowly making that roux come to the sort of peanut butter color that I like and that I've been accustomed to. And once I have that roux, then I begin—I sauté my onions and bell peppers and celery in that. I have--I generally use a stock, a chicken stock that I make; I like to make chicken salad a lot and I save stock, so I make a good chicken stock and I boil a--a piece of lemon and celery and onions with my chickens, and I keep that stock, and I flavor it. That's what I—a lot of times freeze stock and keep it in the freezer. And I'll use that as the basis to be added to my roux. And I--when I start adding my chicken stock I—before that I probably brown my chicken, pieces of chicken cutup, and I brown that and add that to the chicken stock and the roux, bring it to a boil and then get it to that certain liquid consistency that I like and season it with salt and pepper and the--the things that I like and add—. I generally add sausage later and I generally boil my sausage before because I don't like too much oil, and I--I pour the water off of that boiling sausage, and then I'll add the sausage. And at some point I can add fresh oysters if I have those too.

00:53:41

SR: What kind of sausage do you use?

00:53:43

GP: I use various sausages from wherever I can get the local sausage. If I can get fresh sausage I--I certainly will pick that up, and now being in Eunice, [*Laughs*] this is sausage mecca. They are all over. So I like fresh sausage, you know, and cook that down and--and add that.

00:54:01

SR: And is that—do your gumbo preferences come from your family or your childhood?

00:54:08

GP: I would--I would think so. Yeah, that's what I recall. I would like to—look now that I'm back in Acadiana I would like to--to hone my skill at making okra gumbo and starting with getting some fresh okra and smothering that down. And I remember my grandmothers and them doing that in the country in black iron pots—during the summer, cooking okra and cooking it down to a certain consistency and they would freeze it. And so I'd like to learn--relearn how to do that and I'd like to be able to make a chicken gumbo with okra, because as a child I remember that at my grandmother's and it was delicious. And also they would add shrimp, and so I haven't done that in a while, and that's one of--that's on my list of to-do things, to become better at that and improve on that.

00:54:53

SR: So do you think that the chicken and okra gumbo had a roux or no rye?

00:54:59

GP: Oh it had a roux; it definitely had a roux, but not as much roux, but it did have a roux. And the okra was also a thickener. But it did have a roux.

00:55:06

SR: What about filé; did you grow up eating filé?

00:55:10

GP: Well we had filé on the table and I remember it and I do recall adding it, but I'm not too sure I liked filé all the time in certain gumbos, but I did like it occasionally. But I--I--maybe it was a certain taste and certain flavor. But we did use it; it was on the table with a little--in a little glass dish with a little spoon and stuff like that, yeah.

00:55:32

SR: That was probably fresh huh?

00:55:33

GP: I think it was, yeah; uh-huh.

00:55:36

SR: I was going to ask you about—I'll ask you about that some other time. For a final question—I'll wrap it up. I'd like to know what you like the most about your job.

00:55:54

GP: I like the ability to work with people and help people. Here in the library is a--a place where you know people are coming to get information, to find books, to learn something, to execute an assignment or an exercise and to be a part of that and provide them with the resources to answer questions—it's very rewarding to me. I as a child grew up with lots of books. My grandmother in town had a library in her house, besides cookbooks, and in that library she shared with us great books that took us places. So I've always been book-oriented; we participated in summer reading programs in the library and I've always been fascinated by information. And now we—it's just a remarkable the amount of information that we have at our fingertips. I think the Internet and online databases and everything is fascinating. So it's wonderful to work with that information—electronic and emerging information sources—but it's also important for me to work with historic resources, the kinds of things that I've loved—I mean of pictures and ephemera like menus and pamphlets and cookbooks and those kinds of things, so I get the best of both worlds. I get to work with both historic and—and first editions and new books being--coming out, being written about food history or botany or whatever it may be. So it's--it's like you're at the vortex of lots of information coming your way and being informed, and that's good; that's a good feeling.

00:57:42

SR: Well it sounds like—I didn't know that your grandmother had this sort of scholarly influence on you too. Were there other people in your family who went into academics?

00:57:51

GP: Actually my grandmother in town was probably the most noteworthy. And my grandfather, her first husband, was a very successful businessman. Of course he had the Hotel Frederic, and then he passed away and my grandmother remarried and her--her second husband was an architect, who also liked books and music and stuff like that. So their home, the Patout home was always filled with—I remember, they listened to opera and they always had beautiful books and they had a library in this home with the classics and a lot--lot of Louisiana books. People would visit New Iberia and the Hotel Frederic and she befriended people—authors and writers and so—and she actually started the Literary Club in New Iberia, the Fortnightly Club, and I think it's like in its 80th year. And they have lots of Fortnightly Clubs, younger Fortnightly Clubs. Hers was the Senior Fortnightly, and they would study a book. They would have a book program once a month and they would serve luncheons and it would give them an opportunity to learn about what was going on in the world and about books, but also to express themselves in terms of food by having one of these nice ladies luncheons with probably shrimp remoulade and tomato aspics and all these delicious 1950s and '60s dishes that--that were very Louisiana and New Iberia.

00:59:21

SR: Wow, you have a lot of—you have a book in you about that family. [*Laughs*] Is there any-- is there anything that you'd like to say that you think I forgot to ask?

00:59:31

GP: No, I think we--we've covered a lot. I've probably been more effusive and expansive than you wanted on some of these topics but nevertheless that's--that's pretty much my take on what I

see. And if I can ever assist any further in the documenting here in Eunice, the food culture and the--the Boudin Trail, I would--I'd love to participate and I'm certainly going to work at it here at LSU at Eunice.

00:59:59

SR: Well thank you. I'm sure you can help and I appreciate it. This is great.

01:00:05

[End Gerald Patout-2 Interview]