

**DOT VIDRINE
Ruby's Café - Eunice, LA**
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Interviewer: Sara Roahen, Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Project: Lunch Houses of Acadiana – Louisiana

[Begin Dot Vidrine Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm in Eunice, Louisiana at Ruby's Café with Miss Dot Vidrine. And if I could get you to state your own name—your full name—for me, and your birth date, we'll get started?

00:00:17

Dorothy Vidrine: I'm Dorothy Vidrine. And I was born the eighth month, the tenth, and thirty-three—August 10, 1933. And I have been a Cajun all my life, and I understand a lot of the Cajun French. We had some visitors [in Eunice] from Belgium and I was the only one that could speak because they didn't speak English; it was all French from the part of Belgium where they came from.

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And we really had a great time for seven days with them, and now I understand the Canadian language very well. But I have a hard time to understand the people from France.

[Laughs] But we really—we can really understand each other and I can explain to them all about the Cajuns up to—. I was born in '33 but I always spoke French. Always did.

00:01:36

SR: Where were you born?

00:01:38

DV: I was born in Basile, which was about 12 miles from here—Basile, Louisiana. And I came down here in Eunice when I was 14, and I was working for Mr. and Mrs. Picou's drugstore in the ice-cream parlor. And I went to school and I'd work during—after-hours and on weekends. Then I went to work for the Roosevelt Café, which was offering me \$10 more a week. That was big money at that time. And then I went to work at the Oleander, which was a huge restaurant, and in fact it was the biggest social, you know, restaurant around here at that time.

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And I got along because I understood French and English. And a lot of these people could not explain themselves what the food was, and I could.

00:02:49

SR: Where was the Oleander?

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DV: The Oleander was about five miles out of town going towards Basile and it burnt down quite a few years back. But we had—it was the only place that you could have seafood platters and stuff like that. The nearest from here would have been like in Lafayette or something, and that's why the Oleander was so popular. It had anything and everything, you know, from steaks to any kind of seafood(s) and stuff like that.

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SR: Is there a comparable restaurant now in the area?

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DV: Really they have but it's not—it's not quite the same as what the Oleander had. If we were open nights we would definitely have like seafood platters and stuff like that, but we close at 2:00. We're open at 5:30 in the morning and we close at 2:00 so we don't have any night business at all, you know.

00:04:04

SR: So I'll just kind of backtrack a little bit. When you say "we," you're talking about Ruby's Café. Could you tell me what your association is with Ruby's?

00:04:15

DV: My sons Curt and Dwayne are the owners. And I'm just there to greet the people in and sit them down, and I know everybody and everybody knows me. And that's really my purpose. I'm not a person to sit home and watch TV all day—the soap operas or anything. I'm a—I'm a people person.

00:04:48

SR: And could you tell me Curt and Dwayne's last names?

00:04:53

DV: Curt is Curt Fontenot and Dwayne is Vidrine.

00:04:57

SR: Okay, and so they haven't always owned Ruby's. Can you tell me a little bit about the history of the restaurant and how they came to be the owners?

00:05:05

DV: Ruby's has been here since—well, it's over 90 years old but it was the--a little breakfast restaurant at first, just doughnuts and coffee. And then it went on to just plate lunches with Miss Ruby, which you have no choice. She had these kinds of meats and these kinds of vegetables and you had no choice. It was just a little bit of this and a little bit of that. Now we offer four choices of meats every day and four choices of vegetables every day with your rice and gravy. And we give you a small salad before, and we give you a dessert.

00:05:54

SR: What was Ruby's full name?

00:05:58

DV: Ruby Mott—M-o-t-t. Ruby opened this in '59, and it was the year that Hurricane Audrey hit so hard—Louisiana so hard. [Interviewer's note: Hurricane Audrey occurred in 1957.] And this was the only place we could run from one place to the other to get a fast bite to eat while the storm was going on. And then all powers were shut down so we'd just get cold sandwiches until we were able to get back to our destiny.

00:06:39

SR: So you came from your house and got something to eat at Ruby's?

00:06:45

DV: No, no; we were working. I was working at Walls Department Store and all the wires were down sizzling on the road. And just when we thought it was over, that's when we ran to Ruby's to eat, and then by the time we came back what happened is we were right in the eye of the hurricane. So it started hitting harder. But we had gotten a bite to eat.

00:07:12

SR: Did you make it home?

00:07:13

DV: Oh yeah. Well I couldn't make it back to Basile because at that time the trees were all across the highways. But the state troopers did let us know when the coast was clear so we could get back to our home.

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SR: Did you say that was the first year that Ruby was open?

00:07:32

DV: The first year Ruby was open; that was in '59. [Interviewer's note: Hurricane Audrey occurred in 1957.]

00:07:39

SR: Do you remember what you ate?

00:07:40

DV: I think it was a cold ham sandwich or something, but she had no other way to fix anything else, you know with all the powers down and everything.

00:07:56

SR: So she operated the restaurant until what year? What year did Curt and Dwayne purchase the restaurant?

00:08:03

DV: Six years ago, but we--we all remodeled. We had to remodel because it was still under the grandfather's clause and we had to have like the handicapped special bathrooms, and we had to have the place rewired and all the—everything we repainted and decorated as you've seen it. And we've been working real hard at it, and we double—well, really, we tripled the business.

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We had to buy the second commercial stove, which we're cooking with 16 burners and two big ovens and it takes everything we have.

00:08:52

SR: To keep up?

00:08:52

DV: To keep up with everything. And then we have this banquet hall, and so whenever during the weeks when it isn't a day that we have the Kiwanis or the Rotary Club or the Woodmen of the World, if it gets too packed over there—mainly during the spring, you know all through the summer—we open the banquet room and let them come in and we send a waitress over here and take their orders.

00:09:21

SR: Yeah, I didn't mention that in the beginning. We're actually sitting in a banquet hall that is attached—is around the corner from Ruby's but is attached to the restaurant through the kitchen.

00:09:32

DV: Right, right.

00:09:34

SR: Okay. And you have the Kiwanis and the Rotary Club come once a week, you were saying?

00:09:37

DV: Every week. Wednesdays is the Rotary and every Thursday is the Kiwanis. And every first Monday of the month is the Woodmen of the World.

00:09:50

SR: And do they all eat the same thing?

00:09:52

DV: Yes, yes. They require [request] what they want so it makes it easier on us and easier on them that we don't double it up next week, you know. And we just let them choose what they want to have and then we just fix it and bring it in and serve it to them. They all agree on the same thing.

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SR: Prior to—to “the boys,” you call them—purchasing the restaurant, did you eat at Ruby's a lot?

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DV: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. But yeah, I was working at another place, at the food stamp office, and we'd get our meal just about every day from Ruby's.

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SR: It's a real—now for sure, but even before it was a real like community gathering spot.

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DV: Yes, it was. It wasn't as wide known as it is today because she never--she really never advertised it. We had people that come in and advertise take pictures of our plates, big breakfasts, how we had it, and then like different foods, and they'd take pictures of it and everything to bring—. And I think we're on the internet, if I'm not making a mistake.

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SR: I saw--I saw Ruby's on Facebook.

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DV: Yes. So we really enjoy it. We work together and we decide what we're going to do next and—but now, of course I had catered 22 years before. And I told the boys a lot of the country cooking, and that's what we're doing. Would you want to know the menu for every day? I mean—

00:11:57

SR: Sure. I'd like to know everything I can about the restaurant. If you'd like to talk about the menu, I'd love that.

00:12:01

DV: Well on Mondays—Mondays at noon first thing, the main thing is the baked chicken. We have that every Monday with the cornbread dressing and a choice of four vegetables. And then we have three other meats. On Tuesdays, number one is the fried pork chops. As you've seen they're huge. And--and then we have—hmm, I really didn't notice what he had today because I haven't eaten yet. **[Laughs]** But then on Wednesdays we have the ponce--stuffed ponce; that is the stomach of the hog that is very cleaned and scrubbed and cleaned and scrubbed again, and then they stuff it with grind meat just like you would with the sausage. And then they sew the ponce back and then they hang it in a smokehouse. And so whenever they—they come and ask, *What is the ponce?*, and I try to explain it to them and then they pass me eyes. You know, *Hey,*

what is ponce? And I usually give them a little sample for them to have so they can see what it's all about, but—.

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SR: When you say they ask you, is it—? People from around here know what that is, right?

00:13:32

DV: Right. People—yeah, from out of town, out of state and everything, and I explain to them, but then I just have them cut a little piece of it and let them taste to see. And on Thursdays we have the pork ribs cooked in the oven with the skin up, and we know how to do it to where it makes like a crackle on top like a--a crackling, like a graton. And they—that's number one on Thursdays. And we usually run out because we have free delivery, and like last week we had ran out—ran out of them before 10:30.

00:14:21

And plus besides that, you know we have the gumbo and everything else and different of the kind of meats. And on Fridays we have the catfish courtbouillon, or étouffée if you want to call it like that. We cook that in the oven and it's—then we have the crawfish étouffée, we have the shrimp étouffée which can be served—. Okay, the crawfish mainly served over fried eggplant. We can't furnish it.

00:14:57

SR: You can't what?

00:14:57

DV: Furnish it. They buy it too fast. And then we have the—okay, we have the shrimp étouffée also, and that is served—. Okay, they have the special where you have a bed of rice; you have a whole catfish and covered with the shrimp étouffée. And that's one of the specials.

00:15:27

SR: On Friday?

00:15:27

DV: That's Fridays. And then we have—like everybody says we've got the biggest shrimps anywhere(s) around here. We have fried shrimps. We have fried fish, and which people goes pretty well on that.

00:15:42

SR: Where do you get the shrimp?

00:15:44

DV: We get them from some of the fishermen(s) that we happen to know and that delivers it to us.

00:15:53

SR: Could we backtrack, and could you tell me—because a lot of people listening to this or reading this won't know—what courtbouillon is?

00:16:00

DV: Courtbouillon is—now some people calls it the baked fish--catfish or courtbouillon.

Courtbouillon is, you fix your pan of water, your huge pan, and you put a little bit of cooking oil in it. You chop all your onion heads and real fine and put it in there. You get some chopped tomatoes and put in, and you put a little bit of tomato sauce in there. You do not want your courtbouillon to be too much tomatoes because then it takes away from the taste of the fish. But yet you don't want it bland; you don't want it pale. So you put that, and then we cut up a lot of onion tops and parslets. And once you have it all mixed and you put your seasonings like you want it, then you rinse off your fish real good one piece at a time and you lay it—layered all into that platter. So in other words, after it's cooked you don't have to shake it or anything like that. You cook it in the oven. So whenever you pick up one big piece of fish to put in your plate, you have the whole piece of fish and the gravy and everything.

00:17:22

SR: Right underneath?

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DV: And that is courtbouillon or however—a baked fish or courtbouillon.

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SR: What is parslets?

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DV: Parslet is—

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SR: Parsley?

00:17:37

DV: Parsley—p-a-r-s-l-e-y.

00:17:41

SR: Yeah, okay.

00:17:41

DV: Okay, it's the same thing as cilantro.

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SR: I know what you mean now. I just wasn't sure. It was a different pronunciation. And by “onion heads,” do you mean the white part of the green onion?

00:17:53

DV: No, I mean the heads of onion that you buy in the stores that you have to peel and cut, yeah.

00:18:00

SR: Oh, okay.

00:18:01

DV: But you can put the onion tops and the white part of the onion tops into this.

00:18:07

SR: I'm getting hungry and I just ate a lot [*Laughs*] for lunch. The ponce, do you make that here or do you get that locally?

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DV: Oh we get it locally. We have the LeJeune's [Sausage] Kitchen and that's where we get all our tasso. Do you know what tasso is?

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SR: I do but I'd love it if you'd just describe it.

00:18:29

DV: Okay, it's--it's a piece of either pork or beef strips and they put that hanging. It's boneless and skinless and they put it hanging in a smokehouse for a couple of days and then they take it out, and you just cut that up into whatever you want, you know. It's just like sausages and--and so that's where we get our sausage, our tasso and our ponce. Excuse me. They're very clean people. We know them from way back and we know—we buy only where we know the people is

very clean. I'm very particular when it comes to my food. I like to make sure I know where it comes from and who they are. I won't go buy it because it's on sale anywhere(s); we do not do that.

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Sometimes what you buy on sale is something that has—that cannot be sold anymore and we don't work it like that. And then just like we do not—we do not re-serve, reheat, any kind of food for the next day. At the end of the day whatever little bit there is of anything—very seldom there's anything left—we let the cooks and the people that works in the front, they can share it and take it home to their family because we do not want to start with just a couple of pieces of something to be reheated and then start—. We start brand new every morning.

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SR: How much of that philosophy existed at the café before the boys bought it? Did Miss Ruby have that philosophy?

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DV: No, not really. Not really. She had pork chops and—but you see, she also followed the sales. And to me that is something I didn't—I did not want.

00:20:37

SR: So you—y'all, when you acquired the restaurant, basically started over with recipes and things?

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DV: Yes, we started with my recipes. And being born in '33 I helped my daddy do many boucheries, which is the killing and the cooking and the cutting of all parts of the hogs. Then my daddy had a--he had a little slaughterhouse like in Basile and he'd sell meats and cracklings and stuff like that. So I learned a lot from there. And I would help my mother clean some ponce. But the beef pponce—the beef pponce is not something you can stuff. You have to cut it by pieces and clean; it's very hard to clean but we soak it in a lot of vinegar and soda and scrub again, you know, and that you can eat just boiled.

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Now the--the pork ponce is the one you can stuff and cook in a gravy.

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SR: So the beef pponce you boil, and how do you eat that? Just boil and no gravy, nothing?

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DV: You just boil it and we cut in—well we don't serve it at the restaurant now, but we cut up a lot of onion heads and let it make like a white--whitish little gravy and we eat it over rice.

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SR: Does it taste like the pork ponce?

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DV: No, no. No, it's got a completely different taste but it's good. [*Laughs*]

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SR: Huh, so that would be the beef stomach?

00:22:15

DV: Right.

00:22:18

SR: Okay, I'd like to know a little bit about your family. How long was your family living in this area? Do you know?

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DV: All their lives. Well my mother's daddy and my mother's grandfather and grandmother came down with her mother and her sister from Germany when they were about seven years old. And they made it their home and she didn't speak a word—French, English or anything. And my grandfather didn't speak a word [of] English; it was just French.

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SR: Your grandfather from your father's side?

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DV: My mother's side.

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SR: Oh your mother's side, okay.

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DV: And but then on my father's side, his daddy was originally from Quebec. They have it on his tombstone and he was in the Confederate War, and that is the one place I've always wanted to visit and I have been through the whole country except Canada. [*Laughs*] I have no urge of seeing Germany. I have, you know, no wanting. But Canada—Quebec and Montreal I would like to because that's where my daddy was from. But we--we learned a lot; I mean, you know, from the Cajuns—from the Canadians.

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SR: Your dad, did he live in Canada ever?

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DV: No, Daddy was born here in Louisiana in—but his father was interviewed here in Eunice when he was 85 years-old. They interviewed him and he's in the book; there was a professor, a professor Mr. Hoar from the state of Maine, and he took all his records down. And then he was writing a book, and if I'm not mistaken I think it's the *Old Boys in Gray* or the *Old Soldiers in Gray*. I just never bought the book. And I lost track of Mr. Hoar. I mean I—somehow or another in time there was so much illness and everything in the family where I just lost track of writing to him and him writing to me.

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SR: So that was your grandfather who was in the book, or your daddy?

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DV: That was my grandfather on my daddy's side.

00:24:51

SR: So the German side of your family, did they consider themselves Cajuns or just German?

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DV: No, not really. She became Cajun through living with my grandfather and she started learning some French and then she had her five kids, you know.

00:25:13

SR: Uh-hm. But then your daddy's side, that was full Cajun?

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DV: Right, right.

00:25:18

SR: What about your mom?

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DV: My mom? Mama didn't speak much English—very little. She learned it with us after we started school and we had to be taught English in order to go to school because all we knew was French. And it was just like what they're trying to teach the kids now you know. At that time they didn't want us to speak French because that's all we knew. But they--they made a good living.

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SR: So when you were growing up, the way that your family made money was through the meat market?

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DV: No. First Daddy was working for a mill—lumberyard, I mean—for, yeah, cutting logs and stuff like that. He worked that for many years and he went to work in Lake Charles, Louisiana, which is about 55 miles from Basile. And he was working at the—all these big plants—oh I forgot the names now. But they were all those big plants in Lake Charles, and he'd go back and forth and then after he got to a certain age he opened the market. And but Mama always planted—it wasn't a garden; it was more less a field. And with Daddy working every day in Lake Charles, she—if she needed a chicken coop, Mama would go out there and build it with no problem at all.

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SR: Wow. How many kids did she have?

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DV: Four. We were two girls and two boys.

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SR: So you probably had to help her with that field.

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DV: We did, we did. When we wanted to be mean, though, instead of pulling out the grass we'd pull out the plants and we'd catch a little bit of hell from the German woman. But otherwise, yes, we helped Mama a lot. And we had no washing machines; we had no dryers or anything of the kind. You know we were just—we had to use the rub board and had to hang out the clothes and everything before we went to school. And then we'd come back from school. It was pick up the clothes and sprinkle what had to be ironed and roll it up tight for the next day and she'd iron it. And then she started washing and ironing the clothes for the priests and the nuns in Basile. She done that for many a years, but it was with these little black irons that you had to heat on the--on the wooden stove. It was not all this convenient thing.

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SR: No TV for y'all, I guess?

00:28:26

DV: Uh-uh, no. [*Laughs*] We had a radio. We could only play it on Saturday night to catch the *Grand Ole Opry*. Or the boxing(s). And that wasn't too exciting, but we made our own toys and

it was fun. You look back at it now, that was the good ole days and everybody helped everybody. I mean they'd call it a coup de main. A coup de main is when all the friends gets together and today they work on this one's house. Then probably next week, then they'd decide to work on another one's house. Just like we didn't have meat every day on the table. We had--we had a certain day—one week like Daddy would buy a calf and there were like four or five households, you know, and they'd butcher it and then they'd cook a big dinner. And then the meat, they divided between them. So we had meat for two weeks at least. And we had no refrigerators so the only way we could save our--our meat and our milk was by putting it in jugs, and we had a deep well and we tied the rope around it and let it out down there really slowly so that water kept it cool and safe. But we had to—we had to hurry and salt our meat a lot for it to preserve.

00:30:02

SR: So you probably didn't have milk that frequently.

00:30:05

DV: We had milk pretty much every day. The only thing is that's the only way we could save our milk. And some days Mama decided to just put it in a bowl and within that screened compartment she had, and so she could pick up the milk, you know scrape the--the heavy cream off, and she'd put it in a jar. And when she had the jar almost full, then she'd choose one of us to keep hitting this jar on our--our knee until it would turn butter. And once it would turn butter we'd divide—it would divide itself and then we'd take that butter and put it in another dish and my father and brothers loved the buttermilk.

00:31:04

Excuse me. But we would--we'd just salt it and we had our butter.

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SR: What do you mean by “screen compartment?”

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DV: It's like a window and instead of glass it was just screen so nothing—no bugs or anything—could get in our meat, and yet trying to keep it cool.

00:31:31

SR: Do you know how to spell that phrase when the families come together and work on each other's houses?

00:31:38

DV: Yes, that's a coup de main they call it. A coup de main is one hand helps the others. That was the real meaning of it. Sometimes there were five or six neighbors that would get together and help this one if his floors needed to be changed or his roof needed to be changed. They'd do it you know in one day. And then another time this other one needed help so they'd all do it like that too.

00:32:07

SR: So did you have a lot of family around, or were these just neighbors--friends?

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DV: Neighbors and family but more neighbors than family.

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SR: And is that spelled c-o—? I know how to spell the m-a-i-n for the hand, but—.

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DV: I would just say that it would be like c-o-u—c-o-u.

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SR: Wow.

00:32:33

DV: That was wonderful. At that time it wasn't that mighty dollar. It was from the heart.

Everybody helped everybody and there was no pay.

00:32:43

SR: Do you sense that at all in Cajun communities? Does that still exist with modern conveniences?

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DV: No, no. Now it's, you pay.

00:32:57

SR: Uh-hm. So tell me a little bit about the boucheries.

00:33:01

DV: The boucherie, we—in fact we're going to have it the Sunday before Mardi Gras over here, which we usually have 6,000 to 8,000 people in this little city.

00:33:13

SR: In Eunice?

00:33:14

DV: In Eunice.

00:33:14

SR: The Sunday before Mardi Gras?

00:33:17

DV: Right.

00:33:19

SR: Is that open to the public?

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DV: Right, and it's right here in front of the City Hall. Okay, they have a hog killed at the slaughterhouse and they just bring it. Just killed, but they bring it there and they have the boiling water and they show--let the people see how they scald it, and they have their sharp knife where they shave all that skin and then they open the hog. You can--everybody is there to see it and then they show you what they do with the--like the liver and the heart and stuff like that. That is frisseurs, they call that. And then they take the--all the backbone; they make a big stew and they sell it to the public to taste.

00:34:08

Then they make cracklings with some of the skin; everything is sold right in front of the—it's done and sold right in front of the City Hall. And it's a boucherie. I mean it's something very--very nice for people to see. This was the way we were raised. This is the Cajun way of living. And everybody from out of state is very concerned about seeing this and knowing how everything is done. Now with the head, they remove all these—on the cheekbone and everything, the fatty part, and they make what they call a hogshead cheese, and it is delicious. And they do this—everything right there in front of you so you can see.

00:35:05

Now used to, they'd make the--they make boudin there too. But usually, used to people would make the white boudin and they'd make the red boudin. Well the red boudin is when you butcher the--stab the hog and you'd collect that blood, and once you had your--your meat all boiling to make your boudin, well then you'd put some of that blood in there. And then before you'd stuff it and cook it, so some was the red boudin and some was the plain boudin.

00:35:42

SR: Do they still do that?

00:35:42

DV: Very little. Very little because of the--the food—I mean for diseases and stuff like that.

00:35:57

SR: Do they do it at the boucherie before Mardi Gras?

00:36:01

DV: I don't recall because I haven't been there in two years. I mean I'm at the restaurant but we're so busy in here that I don't go over there to see it. And it's something that I was raised doing.

00:36:12

SR: When your--when your family had boucheries, you would make the blood boudin?

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DV: Oh yeah, definitely.

00:36:17

SR: Did you like it?

00:36:18

DV: Uh yes, I liked it better than the white.

00:36:20

SR: Really?

00:36:21

DV: Oh yes.

00:36:23

SR: It has a rich flavor, huh?

00:36:23

DV: Uh-huh, and it's--it's got a strong taste but it's a good taste, you know. But the Board of Health, I don't know if they--I really don't know if they still allow that or not. Changes has changed, you know and—.

00:36:44

SR: Do you ever get any—not bought commercially, but do people still do it at home anymore?

00:36:49

DV: Uh, yes, but not in town. I mean it's mostly like if you live two or three miles out of town and you decide you want to have a Saturday morning boucherie, they do but they don't do it as

much as what we used to do. You know since they have the slaughterhouses and everything it's so much easier for the people just to pay rather than go help and you know—.

00:37:17

SR: When you were growing up and you would have the boucherie, did your family make the kinds of Cajun things that we see in stores today like the andouille and the tasso and that?

00:37:29

DV: Definitely we did. We would--we'd spend almost a whole day cleaning out the tripes, the insides, cleaning and putting them inside out and passing them in a lot of vinegar and soda which makes it all bubble up and clean it. And sometimes you could clean these tripes almost a whole half a day and see nothing. And then when you were ready to make this andouille you'd find a little knot on one that meant that this hog had worms. So then you had to throw them all—uh-hm. Right, so that's why the people, the Cajuns, about three weeks before they'd butcher a hog they would always make it their business to put like lye, a little bit of lye in the barrel of feed that they'd feed them so that would kill all the worms and make them pass all those worms before they'd butcher them.

00:38:37

SR: Because if the hog had worms, it was just all bad?

00:38:41

DV: Yeah, right.

00:38:41

SR: Just the intestines?

00:38:42

DV: Just the intestines, just the intestines. But then and we'd--we'd cut strips for our tasso and then we'd grind a lot of it to make our sausages. We made our own sausage; we made our own hogshead cheese. Really the only thing that they wouldn't eat out of a hog at the end of the day was really the teeth and the nose [*Laughs*] because even the tail, they'd make a crackling with that. They'd throw it with the pieces and make a crackling.

00:39:20

SR: And did everyone want the tail?

00:39:22

DV: Oh yes, everybody wanted the tail [*Laughs*] because it was long and, you know, it was crispy and—oh yeah.

00:39:29

SR: Did y'all pickle any meat?

00:39:31

DV: Baby, we used to pickle our meat a lot because they call it—when you just use a lot of salt to preserve your meat, they called that the ti salé Now whenever they—okay, in the beef meat, Mama and them would salt it a lot and put a lot of pepper and they would call that grillades amarinée. It was just the piece of meat but it was soaked for days in that heavy ice-cream salt and--and pepper. And it would soak in there for days and then they'd wash it out real clean and then cook it. And that was a grillades amarinée.

00:40:29

SR: So that's kind of like pickling then, I guess?

00:40:32

DV: That is pickling. That is pickling.

00:40:34

SR: Was your mom a good cook?

00:40:35

DV: Yes, my mother loved to cook. My mother loved to cook. Now the only thing we'd pickle like--what you're probably talking about is like the--the hog's ankles, feet, pickled feet. That they would do.

00:40:55

SR: Well I was thinking about in New Orleans there's a lot of pickled pork that people use in beans and I was just wondering if y'all did that.

00:41:06

DV: No, no. No there's a big difference in New Orleans and here. New Orleans, it's not Cajun. It's—let's see. Over here it's Cajun. In New Orleans it's--it's called another name—.

00:41:28

SR: Creole.

00:41:28

DV: Creole, but they use a lot of--a lot of tomatoes in all their food. And here in Acadian Parish, I mean Acadiana, we don't use a lot of tomatoes.

00:41:45

SR: Did your mom grow tomatoes?

00:41:47

DV: Oh yes, she grew tomatoes. She grew her cabbage, beautiful heads of cabbage. She'd raise her own lettuce, which it wasn't the heads. It was the loose lettuce and it tasted so much better. You'd just tear the--the leaves up and then pour vinegar on it. Oh, it was delicious. And okra. Okra is one thing that they always planted a lot of, and mustard greens. Now for some reason or

another we never thought to eat a lot of cauliflower or—hmm, turnip greens. We wouldn't eat the greens; we'd eat the turnips in a stew or boiled with mustard greens and stuff like that.

00:42:40

SR: Hmm, but not the greens of the turnip?

00:42:41

DV: No, but now—

00:42:43

SR: Maybe your mom didn't like those.

00:42:43

DV: I don't think that anybody done it at that time. But now everybody does you know. So that has changed from our Cajuns.

00:42:54

SR: When you had a boucherie, did y'all make boudin, always?

00:42:58

DV: Yes. Oh yes, we made the boudin. We made a lot of rice dressing and we had the--the frisseurs cooked. We had backbone stew and there was a variety of different things that they'd--they'd fix.

00:43:17

SR: Whenever I hear about the boucherie it sounds so fun.

00:43:21

DV: It was.

00:43:21

SR: Was it fun? It sounds so fun.

00:43:23

DV: It was, it was fun because we were young, very young, and the only thing is like the first north wind when we'd hear mama say, *Well the wind is going to turn to the north*, and we'd look at each other and we kind of like dread it because we knew we had to get up early in the morning and it was cold. That first north wind, that was a boucherie, and we'd get cold really. But it was all in fun, and it was fun.

00:43:57

It's like I say, you look back at it today, that was the good ole days. I'd go hunting with my brothers. We'd go and pick up hickory nuts, which it would take you maybe a week to finally clean enough to have a half a coffee cup, but it was fun.

00:44:16

SR: And then what would you do with the hickory nuts?

00:44:20

DV: That's what my mother would boil some syrup until it was beginning to string up and then she'd pour that in there and then she'd just drop a spoonful on waxed paper, and that was candy.

00:44:38

SR: Hickory nut candy?

00:44:38

DV: Uh-hm.

00:44:41

SR: Could you tell me your parents' names?

00:44:42

DV: My father was Tobere—T-o-b-e-r-e Courville and my mother's name was Ada—A-d-a—Marcantel. And now her grandparents, they were Genas—G-e-n-a, yes. But now they were from Germany, you know, and both of my brothers went in the Service and they were imprisoned, and—. But now my oldest brother said one day they had orders to go through this house and so they got down and walked over to the house. And there was a bunch of nuns and so they said, *You're Americans?* And my brother says, *Yes, we don't want to hurt you. We're just hungry.* So they took my brother and them down into the cellar and they had a bunch of bacon just hanging there. So they fed my brothers and them in that cellar for quite a few days.

00:45:49

SR: Where was this?

00:45:50

DV: In Germany.

00:45:51

SR: So did they know that they were—did they tell them about their German heritage?

00:45:56

DV: Right, right. But I mean they said they were Americans you know, and which they were. And but my oldest brother was captured for a year and a half and he was in a camp and saying there was no roof. They were in--in some wiring, and he said, *We were all just sitting there holding each other to keep each other warm.* And the snow was covering them up. And he said, finally one day he said they--they came in with another American and he said when he spoke he said he looked up on the side and he said he recognized it was my godfather. And so but they couldn't let them know that they were kin at all.

00:46:50

And then my godfather was also a minister, and so he'd pray with them. And he said, *We will get out*, you know. And things started getting easier. But he said, *When we had a bite of dry bread we were tickled to death.* But he said—now when he first came back, the first few Germans he seen that—the German girls that married American boys, he'd grit his teeth

sometimes you know. And then we had an old priest that came here at St. Anthony's Catholic Church and it was Father Forché and we couldn't understand him, but he had his tongue cut by the Germans. And so one day I told my brother we had a new priest and I told him, I said, *The only thing, we have a hard time to understand*, I said, *because he cut his tongue*. He said, *What's his name?* And I told him. And so he says, *One day I'd like to come visit you*. I said, *Okay*.

00:47:52

So he came one day and we went and visited Father Forché, and when we walked in my brother just said [his] battalion [and] company, and Father Forché just looked at him and he said, *Oh my God. We were in the same prison camp*. My brother said, *I was there the day they cut your tongue*. So he had a bad feeling towards the Germans. My other brother, it was with the Japs. And his boat had been torpedoed. He was lost for quite a few days on a lifesaver boat. All they had to eat was this little fish that would jump out of the--out of the boat, you know.

00:48:43

SR: That must have been very strange for him, for your—the first brother you told me about—to have such a bad feeling about his—kind of his people, right?

00:48:50

DV: Yeah, definitely. Definitely. It's like he said, he couldn't picture that someone could be so cruel, you know. And not too long after he came back, we had moved here in Eunice and we had these neighbors and he had married a German girl. And every morning she'd come and say, *You got some coffee made?* And I'd say, *Yeah, come on in*. So she'd come in and have her cup of coffee with me. Well that Sunday morning, my brother and them had called; they were coming.

And I told my mama, I said, *I don't know what I'm going to do.* I said, because I said, *Ann will come drink her coffee.* So she said, *Just don't say nothing.*

00:49:40

So later on Ann came and so I told her to come in. And daddy and my brother was sitting in the front room and she had this big hoarse—you know, German talk. When she spoke my brother stood up at that front door and he looked at her and he looked at me and he done like this [*Gestures*]. I said, *This is my neighbor Ann Moreau.* And I introduced them. And he'd listen to her talking and he'd grit his teeth, you know. So after she left he said, *I could not believe you had a German sitting right here.* I said, *Well if that's the case you're a German too. You're part German too.* And but he said, *You have no idea. That sound of that voice lives with you forever,* so—. But he always did say he would have liked to have gone back to Belgium. He had fought through Belgium and Italy and Holland, all them places. And but when the people from Belgium came down here I never dreamed of trying to get him over here. He lived in Kinder and I could have him down here to meet them or something, but I was so occupied at that time. You know I was helping the mayor that was the mayor at that time. She was a lady and so she asked if I was going to take over--help her because she doesn't speak French.

00:51:10

SR: The mayor?

00:51:12

DV: Yeah [*Laughs*].

00:51:13

SR: So the Belgians who were visiting, they were just on vacation or were they dignitaries or—
?

00:51:21

DV: They wanted to come to visit Eunice because this is the twin city of their city in Belgium.

00:51:25

SR: Oh what city is that? Do you know?

00:51:27

DV: I don't recall. I really don't recall. But I know it was Eunice's twin sister and their Mayor was there and they had two teachers, two that was teaching at college, and a young boy that was going to be a lawyer. And I took them to the bank and for them to have an experience of how we done it. Well they couldn't believe; you couldn't borrow from a bank. That was a no-no, and they get paid just once a year.

00:52:00

SR: Oh really?

00:52:01

DV: Uh-huh. And it was--it was interesting, and they couldn't understand that you could go in this bank and just borrow so much money, as much money as you were asking you know, and I'd

tell them, *Well this is the way they do it.* And then I let the girls explain to them and I'd repeat it to them you know. And because there was a loan officer, there was the tellers, you know and—. So I explained everything to them.

00:52:31

'Til finally one day we said--I said, *Look, I'm tired of speaking French.* I was born speaking French [**Laughs**] but this is the longest I've ever in years that I had to stay with speaking just French. You know I was--I'd want to get home and speak that English. [**Laughs**] It was just too much.

00:52:48

SR: Tiring, huh?

00:52:50

DV: Yeah.

00:52:50

SR: So I know you have one son, Dwayne. Do you have other children?

00:52:54

DV: I have three girls. I have Melina, which is my baby. She's 47. Yeah, and I have Sheila that's 50, and I have Dwayne that is going to be 51. And my oldest daughter is 58.

00:53:18

SR: What's your oldest daughter's name?

00:53:19

DV: Clara.

00:53:21

SR: Clara?

00:53:21

DV: Clara.

00:53:22

SR: And do they speak any French?

00:53:24

DV: Clara—my oldest daughter and my baby daughter speaks very well French and they understand. The two middle ones, they were like embarrassed to speak, afraid that they'd make a mistake. Dwayne's the shy type in one way. And they never did want to speak it. But then Sheila and Dwayne is the one that didn't want to speak it. But then her daddy and I kept talking French when we didn't want them to understand. And so she got so nosey to where she started picking up a few—. Now Dwayne speaks a few words, very few words, but he understands.

00:54:08

SR: Uh-hm.

00:54:09

DV: And the only way they could understand when I was angry is when I would raise my voice or I'd call them by their full name. Then they knew Mama was on the warpath. [*Laughs*]

00:54:18

SR: Well it's good for the restaurant that you can speak French, for many reasons I think.

00:54:22

DV: Yes.

00:54:23

SR: I want to go back to your mom. Did she teach you to cook? Is this how you got so interested?

00:54:31

DV: I kept watching Mama cook at the boucheries we did, and at home we did, and then she was a baker. She'd bake homemade cakes and homemade sweet dough pies and I was always with her trying to help her and wanting to know how to do, you know. And so I got to cooking.

00:54:57

Then my youngest daughter is very good in baking. My oldest daughter is good in cooking. The other daughter, neither one. But then I—now I have Dwayne that's cooking, and

then my only grandson, which is going to college in Lake Charles, he's going to be a chef. And but he wants to open a Cajun food [restaurant]. I said, *You won't have to be a chef to cook Cajun food.* **[Laughs]** But yeah, he's in Lake Charles and going to college and he's hoping to finish soon. And I have seven grandkids. I had three girls and one boy in my children. The grandchildren, I had six girls and one boy. I have one grandson. But then when the great-grands came up, I have nine boys and just two girls. **[Laughs]**

00:55:56

SR: Switcharoo.

00:55:58

DV: Right, shift around.

00:56:01

SR: It seems like you—you know, you've mentioned many jobs that you've had but they've mostly been in food.

00:56:09

DV: Right.

00:56:10

SR: Is this—you know, your son owning this restaurant and you being so involved, is that something that you've wanted to do?

00:56:17

DV: I had worked in restaurants, and like I said at first, when I first came to Eunice, you know I was working in restaurants. But then I worked for department stores, assistant manager for 20 years, and then I done catering myself. But then Dwayne and them was always interested in—him and Curt—into helping me cater and helping me decorate, and the more you decorate your platters the prettier they are, the more you want to decorate more, you know. I use a lot of fruits to decorate my platters, a lot of fruits.

00:56:55

SR: I saw Curt had an apron on. Is he cooking here at Ruby's?

00:56:59

DV: Yes, he's the main—

00:57:00

SR: Oh, so was he a cook before?

00:57:02

DV: He's the main—he never—well he'd helped me, you know, but never dreaming that he'd be doing this. And Dwayne was a banker believe it or not.

00:57:13

SR: A banker.

00:57:15

DV: So they both left their career and came to this and they're doing very, very well.

00:57:23

SR: And you told me that Curt was an RN.

00:57:26

DV: Right, right.

00:57:28

SR: So he has an eagle eye for—?

00:57:31

DV: He's got an eye on all of them, honey. They have better—and he watches very carefully. He catches anything on the second. If one is missing and he'll come out of the kitchen and look and they're in the bathroom. But if they don't come out wiping those hands with the paper towel—*Go back in.* Very, very strict.

00:57:55

SR: So I saw that you had other people working in the kitchen. Are there any employees left from when Ruby Mott owned the [restaurant]?

00:58:00

DV: There's only Kaylor in the front, the older looking one. She worked for Ruby all the time that Ruby was there. There's 30-somewhat years she's been working in that place. She knows it inside out.

00:58:14

SR: Wow. Is Ruby alive?

00:58:17

DV: No, Ruby has died about 14 years ago.

00:58:20

SR: Oh okay. So she had passed before the boys bought the restaurant?

00:58:23

DV: Right. And I asked her boys if it was okay if we keep her name, you know in the respect of her. We'd just keep the name of Ruby, and they were 100-percent for it.

00:58:39

SR: And so was the restaurant operating when Dwayne and Curt bought it or not?

00:58:44

DV: It had been. Yes, yes, it was operating. There's a young woman that had taken it over but she wasn't doing much. And once we got into it I said, *We've got to go all the way now.* We go Cajun all the way and let the people know, you know. So we have people from Breaux Bridge, we have people from Lafayette, from all over that comes to eat those ribs on Thursdays. And then we have a lot of people that comes from Allen Parish, which is Kinder to Oakdale and everything. They come to eat those ribs.

00:59:22

SR: I need to come back on a Thursday. What inspired Dwayne and Curt to do this?

00:59:30

DV: I think it was by helping me as much as they raised cane that they had to come help me cater. And once the restaurant was—I heard it was for sale—I got in touch with them and they came, and it seems like it just got into their blood right then and there. But now you didn't see Dwayne with an apron.

00:59:51

SR: No.

00:59:52

DV: He's the one that controls the cash. [*Laughs*]

00:59:55

SR: I saw him counting the money.

00:59:59

DV: Yeah, yeah.

00:59:59

SR: And it seems like—I've been in the café a few times; it seems like they're happy.

01:00:06

DV: Very happy, very happy.

01:00:09

SR: What does it mean to you—and by *you* I mean them too—to have the community of Eunice basically in your dining room every day?

01:00:18

DV: It feels good. Most of our lawyers and like our doctors, they all come there. They all come there.

01:00:32

SR: I saw you sitting at pretty much every table in there.

01:00:36

DV: Yes, I walk around and talk. I love to meet people. I love to talk and--and then I'll get up and try to find my place to sit. You know sometimes it gets to where it's pretty full. But I just know everybody and everybody has been knowing me all my life, so around here, so—. I just enjoy being there, and when I'm not there, the days I'm not there they're breaking their heads to know where is Miss Dot. **[Laughs]** Everybody is afraid I'm sick or something. But it feels good; it feels good to know that the community is support[ing] them so, so much.

01:01:20

SR: And you're in a great location, like right by the theater, sort of in the center of everything.

01:01:25

DV: Right.

01:01:27

SR: Tell me about the gravy. We were talking about it before I turned the microphone on, but I mentioned the gravy and you said—.

01:01:37

DV: Okay. What I was saying was most restaurants, if they have to make a big pot of gravy for big roasts and stuff, they will use that powdered gravy you can buy. We don't do that; that's a no-no. Or, you can buy the liquid—it's a thick gravy in jars; that's a no-no. If you can't make your own gravy, you don't cook it. There's no such a thing as you can't make a brown gravy. Rather it's pork, beef, or chicken, you can make a gravy. It just takes more effort. You cook your

meat in water and oil and just keep adding the water and just keep turning it until you, you know you see your meat is real—and then gradually it'll get brown. Sometimes you get a hold of some meat that doesn't want to take--get brown. You just cook it until you see that it's cooked and then what you do is you sprinkle onion—I'm giving you my secrets now.

01:02:50

SR: No, don't worry. I won't be able to do it. [*Laughs*]

01:02:52

DV: You sprinkle a little bit of onion powder at the bottom of the pan and but you have to watch it closely. Don't leave the stove. And turn it over again because that is going to get brown just like that. [*Gestures*]

01:03:08

SR: Turn what over again, the meat?

01:03:10

DV: Right, the meat. You keep turning the meat over and then when you see that it's getting dark, then you put a little bit of water at a time and keep adding and let it cook and turn it over and keep adding water. And you can make a pot-full.

01:03:29

SR: Okay, if I brown my meat I just take oil. No water?

01:03:34

DV: It's going—

01:03:37

SR: So yeah, from the beginning do you put water in there?

01:03:40

DV: Right, a little bit of water and a little bit of grease. And you start cooking it like that and then you keep turning your meat and adding a little bit of water. As you see your water is, you know, steaming out, you just keep adding a little bit more water, because if you just—cooking your meat, you just put it in hot—you know in oil—it starts cooking dry, but then it toughens your meat, it seizes your meat. But if you're cooking it in water and cooking oil, your meat does not seize. And where your roasts will go a lot further, and at the same time your meat is going to be very, very tender.

01:04:25

SR: Are you talking about keeping it uncovered the whole time, or do you cover it?

01:04:29

DV: Either ways. You just leave your pot halfway open. You know, just put the lid halfway on.

01:04:36

SR: Is that like smothering your meat?

01:04:39

DV: Yes, yes, similar--similar to it.

01:04:44

SR: So I had some really—I had the beef tips today and there was a lot of brown gravy. And so this is how they cook the beef tips, is what you're saying?

01:04:52

DV: You just cook it altogether and just keep turning it and stirring into it and just keep adding water and keep stirring it and then finally it starts getting real brown. And you just let it get brown to your desire, you know, and then just keep adding a little bit of water and—

01:05:09

SR: What about, like, were there onions in there or—?

01:05:13

DV: Yeah, you can put onions, chopped onions and stuff. Yeah.

01:05:18

SR: So I didn't think any Cajuns—no self-respecting Cajun—would use the powdered gravy. I didn't think.

01:05:22

DV: No, no. And I'll tell you what. Any of them that uses all these--these spices—that is not Cajun. More than onion heads, onion top, parsley, pepper, red pepper and salt—any more than that is not Cajun.

01:05:47

SR: You mean like the Cajun seasoning mixes and all that?

01:05:50

DV: No, no. If you're going to use curry and all—thyme and all of that, Cajun people does not use any of that. Nothing.

01:06:04

SR: You mentioned earlier when we were talking that you call this *country cooking*, what you do at Ruby's. Is that right?

01:06:13

DV: Right, country cooking.

01:06:16

SR: And so what about, like, gumbo? Tell me about your gumbo. I tried to order it today but you were out already.

01:06:23

DV: You're kidding? Well I have an ex-son-in-law that lives in Wyoming and every time they come, him and his mom and dad, I have to have a gumbo. And I kept showing him how to do it. Finally—and he called me from Wyoming. *Okay, Mama, I have my water in--in the pot. I have everything right there.* I said, *Put your chicken in it. Put your sausage or tasso, whatever you want.* And I said, *Then you put your roux.* Roux is something that you have to brown your—you have to make your roux first. You have to have your cooking oil and then you let it heat up and put some flour in it and just keeping stirring it fast because it's going to burn fast and easy. So you just keep stirring it real constantly, real good, and then once it gets brown to your desire, then you just turn it off. And so you put roux into your pot of water and then you put all—everything: all your seasonings and your chicken and everything and you just let it brew. You just keep—

01:07:47

SR: Could he do that in Wyoming?

01:07:48

DV: Yes, he finally learned. He finally learned. He tried many, many times and so now he says when he's got one brewing up, he said, *You see them coming from all ends.* [Laughs] He said, *That smell, you know—.*

01:08:03

SR: So you don't sauté your seasoning vegetables first? You just put them in the water?

01:08:09

DV: Right, right.

01:08:11

SR: Okay, and also with the roux, do you stir it in slowly or do you just put it all in?

01:08:16

DV: No, you have to stir it really slowly, baby.

01:08:21

SR: No, I mean when you put it in the water, when you put it in the pot?

01:08:22

DV: Oh no--no after, no. Just once in a while.

01:08:26

SR: Oh I see.

01:08:28

DV: And then your--your water naturally will turn brownish, and then if you see you don't have quite enough roux, then you put another--you know, another spoonful.

01:08:36

SR: So you put it in kind of gradually while it's cooking?

01:08:39

DV: Right, right, according to how you want it.

01:08:41

SR: And at the restaurant, I can't remember—was that chicken-sausage gumbo that you had?

01:08:46

DV: Uh-hm.

01:08:46

SR: And how about dark do y'all get your roux?

01:08:49

DV: I'd say medium and medium-brown. And we had sausage and tasso and chicken in it. They were out of it?

01:09:04

SR: Yeah. **[Laughs]** Is that something you learned from your mom?

01:09:10

DV: Yes, yes. Yeah, Mother just learned of her own because she didn't have a mother-in-law, you know, and no--nothing like that to teach her. But they usually watch each other and do as the other is doing.

01:09:27

SR: How do you feel about the roux in the jar?

01:09:28

DV: It's okay. Yeah, if I'm in a hurry I'll use that because it's so much easier.

01:09:39

SR: Better than not eating.

01:09:41

DV: Right, right.

01:09:44

SR: Let me see some of the questions I had. Can you tell me just about Miss Ruby? Is there anything you can tell me about her as a person? What kind of person was she?

01:09:54

DV: She was a very nice person, Cajun woman, and her husband sold cars for the Chevrolet company all his life until he retired. And, but as you see there, this kitchen had no—she had no air-conditioning in that kitchen. She just had a fan that would blow the heat out. She'd cook all her food herself and she just had her and one lady that would do the dishes.

01:10:27

SR: That's it?

01:10:28

DV: Now we have six in the kitchen, so you know we tripled.

01:10:32

SR: Yeah.

01:10:33

DV: But no, she worked until like the afternoon and then the next morning she died.

01:10:40

SR: Hmm.

01:10:41

DV: Worked herself to death.

01:10:42

SR: How old was she? Do you know?

01:10:43

DV: Ruby must have been about 63, 64 years old.

01:10:48

SR: Not old enough. One thing I was going to ask you: so we're doing this oral history project with Cajun lunch houses. Now, I've spent a little bit of time out in Acadiana and I've had great lunches. It's sometimes difficult to find—especially in the smaller towns—places to eat dinner or, you know, an evening meal. Is that--why is that?

01:11:12

DV: Well it's like I said, if we could have gotten a larger place—which, we'll never let go of Ruby's—we would have gotten a larger place, then we would have stayed open nights because they have--they have one at the other end and they have the old Chatterbox. I went there Saturday and tried it but whatever they rolled their shrimps in, it doesn't hold to the shrimp. The stuffed crabs is the same thing we get with Sysco, so there's really nothing—there's really nothing in Eunice for nights. Now they have Nick's across the street, but they're unreal—the prices—and the service is so slow that--and people are there—. If people are there a half hour they want their food, you know, and it's not like that.

01:12:28

SR: So is this because Cajuns cook at home? Is that why there aren't dinner places?

01:12:34

DV: No, they're going out in other cities to eat. [*Laughs*] We go to D.I.'s; some nights we go to the Mexican place; another night we go to DC's.

01:12:50

SR: What's that—DC's?

01:12:50

DV: D C's at the other end. They serve steaks and stuff like that. And every night we try to go to one different place. Now you don't see the other restaurant owners do that but we do. I mean I'm alone; my husband is deceased and so the boys will always call me: *Mama we're going to eat here. Come meet us.* And this is every night and you just get to where—the other night I said, *No. I want nothing but cornbread.* And he said, *Well, Mama?* I said, *I'm making a big cornbread. I'm going to eat it with my milk as a cereal because that's how I like it.* We were raised like that. And he said, *I can't believe it.* I said, *Baby, I'm so tired of eating.* It's--no matter where you go it's the same thing, you know. The fast-food—I don't know. If it's fried fish, we have it there. If it's shrimps, we have it there. It's just—now, we'll drive to Crowley. We'll drive to Rayne.

01:13:55

SR: What's there?

01:13:55

DV: Well they have big restaurants that's very popular, you know, and we'll go eat there. But when you stop and think of it, it's still all the same thing. Now the most--the most famous thing here as a gumbo is okra gumbo. Okra and shrimp gumbo is delicious. You just smother your okra until it's real thick, you know, and then you just put your water and--and your tomatoes, chopped tomatoes, and you put a little bit of roux in it and then you put whatever you want in there. And that we get at—hmm, hmm, hmm—that's in Crowley at a restaurant.

01:14:49

SR: Smothered—is it smothered okra? Is that what you call it?

01:14:50

DV: No, you smother it but then you have to put it in your pot of water with all your ingredients and whatever you want.

01:14:59

SR: Oh, so gumbo. Yeah, right.

01:15:01

DV: Yeah, so but that is one good thing; very delicious.

01:15:07

SR: Do you ever serve smothered okra at Ruby's?

01:15:09

DV: Yes, twice a week. [*Laughs*]

01:15:12

SR: Yeah?

01:15:12

DV: And smothered cabbage once a week.

01:15:15

SR: I was going to ask you if you ever do boudin at Ruby's.

01:15:20

DV: No, no. I have done boudin when I was catering and if it was for a huge crowd that we were expecting it was cheaper for me to make my boudin than buying it at so much a pound, yeah. So I'll just go ahead and buy my meat and boil it and--and grind it, and I'd buy my casings you know, and I'd make my own boudin.

01:15:45

SR: Hmm, but not at the restaurant?

01:15:48

DV: Yeah, not at the restaurant.

01:15:50

SR: Do you have a favorite boudin place in town? I don't want to get you in trouble with anyone but—.

01:15:54

DV: Yes, to me T-Boys at the other end of town is the best.

01:16:01

SR: How come? What do you like about it?

01:16:02

DV: He makes it more like the Cajuns did—more meat and less rice. It's very good.

01:16:12

SR: And do you eat boudin a lot?

01:16:14

DV: Oh yes. I love it.

01:16:16

SR: What time of day?

01:16:18

DV: Almost any time. But I'm not supposed to have it because I've had two heart attacks. I have 10 stints and I've had cancer.

01:16:29

SR: Oh god.

01:16:28

DV: Oh yeah, I'm just—oh yeah.

01:16:30

SR: You look great.

01:16:31

DV: Oh honey, and I'm still at it.

01:16:34

SR: Yeah, that's what boudin will do to you, huh?

01:16:37

DV: Oh yeah. But you know they say boudin, but you know the boudin is not—it's not that bad for you to eat. It's--it's really not that fattening. You know they don't use just the fat part of the hog to make it. So no, I love—. Now I'll make hogshead cheese with chicken and it tastes just like it. You could never tell the difference and yet it's so much healthier.

01:17:10

SR: How do you do that?

01:17:12

DV: You boil your--your chicken, de-bone your chicken and boil it, and after it's boiled and done—I usually put a big piece of celery [in the pot] while it's boiling. And then I take [the celery] out and I pass [the meat] in my food processor until it's all processed. And then I take my seasoning and I'll season it the way I want and then I take some of that broth in another pot and I cut my onion tops, my parsley, and just let it sauté in that hot water—you know, that broth. And you salt and pepper, and then I come and I just pour it in there and mix it up real, real good because the broth makes the jelly. And, but to make sure I sometimes use like one little pack of unflavored gelatin, and you just mix it up and put it in a mold and it tastes just—so once you take just these onion tops now, you don't take the water out of that, and you just mix it in there and it tastes just like hogshead cheese except it's made with chicken and it's healthier.

01:18:29

SR: Did you make that up?

01:18:30

DV: I did. I catered so much and I always had more chicken meat grinded than I needed for the chicken salad sandwiches so I decided, *Well let me try something*. So then I tried it like that and then I put some unflavored gelatin and it—after it molded and I tasted it I said, *This is delicious*. So then I'd give them this as lagniappe and I'd make two or three molds with that and wouldn't charge them.

01:19:02

And so then after everybody started tasting it they said, *We can't tell the difference*. And my husband couldn't have pork and my husband couldn't have this, but then they can eat this. I said, *That's right*.

01:19:14

SR: So that's smart. I might have to try that.

01:19:17

DV: It's delicious.

01:19:18

SR: Speaking of husbands, your husband, you said, passed away. What did your husband do for a living?

01:19:22

DV: My husband was a truck driver all his life. And he died 20 years ago.

01:19:32

SR: Oh, I'm sorry. Was he Cajun?

01:19:36

DV: Oh very much; very much [*Laughs*]. Very much Cajun. But he didn't like to do too much of, like, cleaning a turtle. My daddy and I'd clean our turtles.

01:19:49

SR: No?

01:19:48

DV: Uh-um; that was a no-no. He just didn't care for none of that you know.

01:19:56

SR: Did he like to eat?

01:19:58

DV: Oh yes, oh yes. Once I'd do it he loved it but—.

01:20:09

SR: I think we've covered a lot.

01:20:11

DV: Well thank you.

01:20:13

SR: Is there anything that you want to tell me about the restaurant that I haven't asked?

01:20:19

DV: No, the only thing is that we're hoping that—. That insurance business that you came around to get here, they're—supposedly for the last four years they're supposed to be finding some property or buying—or moving—and they haven't. But if ever they do we--we're hoping to open. We'll just put an arch and open up to Main Street, so that's—.

01:20:48

SR: That would be big.

01:20:49

DV: Yes, if only we can get that spot you know.

01:20:55

SR: Yeah. Oh that makes me think—the extra work. You said you open at 5:30?

01:21:01

DV: Do what?

01:21:02

SR: Ruby's opens at 5:30 in the morning?

01:21:04

DV: Yes, yes, oh yes, and they have omelets. They make their own restaurant omelets and stuff and they make their own pancakes. They have the [*Unintelligible*] and they're about this thick and about this big around [*Gestures*]. You get two per order. They make their own waffles. They have anything and everything. I mean, yeah, they—.

01:21:28

SR: Do people eat that early here?

01:21:30

DV: Oh definitely. Most of our lawyers and doctors, they go walk. They--they do their walk early in the morning like that and then they come straight at Ruby's and then they sit down—and guess what? They wasted it all because they're eating omelets and biscuits. [*Laughs*] But at least they're walking some of it off.

01:21:56

SR: They're working hard to be able to eat there.

01:21:58

DV: Oh yeah, oh yeah. But they do. And we have hot biscuits every morning. We have the--the croquesignoles; that's the old time doughnuts.

01:22:13

SR: Do you always have that?

01:22:14

DV: Uh-hm, uh-hm.

01:22:15

SR: How do you spell that, do you know?

01:22:18

DV: Oh I have my book at home but—.

01:22:22

SR: I can look it up, but can you describe those to me?

01:22:24

DV: It's like a homemade doughnut. You mix all your ingredients and then you lay it on the table, you know, and you kind of roll it out, and then you cut it by pieces and just drop it in the hot grease, and then you put powdered sugar—you know, if you really want to—over it. And then we have the pain perdu. That's the French toast.

01:22:58

SR: All of this every day?

01:22:58

DV: Every day, every day.

01:23:02

SR: What time do people come in to start cooking if you open at 5:30?

01:23:06

DV: They get here at 5:00.

01:23:10

SR: That is early.

01:23:11

DV: But they all jump and help each other.

01:23:14

SR: I mean, people must start working pretty early around here.

01:23:18

DV: Yeah, most of them starts like around 7:00, a little bit earlier. Some a little bit later, and some eats breakfast until about 10:30.

01:23:29

SR: Yeah, that would be me. Oh, I wanted to ask you about this downtown area of Eunice. Was it always like this? Was it when you first started working in Eunice—?

01:23:42

DV: No, it didn't have this crazy looking street. [*Laughs*] Eunice, the main part of Eunice was the shortness of parking space, but then when this--this old mayor came in, he had visited someplace in France and they had just modeled this new thing, so he did [too]. Well then, that makes it that much shorter, you know—less parking place. I mean that's the worst part of our little city.

01:24:17

SR: Is the lack of parking?

01:24:20

DV: Lack of parking. Some people park two blocks away from the restaurant to get to the restaurant to eat.

01:24:28

SR: Was it a busier town or a smaller town when you first started working here?

01:24:32

DV: No, it was about this size. It was about this size.

01:24:38

SR: And what is the main industry here?

01:24:40

DV: Crawfish, rice, rice planters, soybean planters. That's mainly what it is.

01:24:49

SR: Do you get your rice for the restaurant around here?

01:24:53

DV: We get the Louisiana rice for the restaurant and we don't use anything else but the Louisiana crawfish to cook. I will not use the Chinese crawfish or whatever other crawfish they have.

01:25:10

SR: You have to pay a little bit more for that, huh?

01:25:13

DV: We do pay quite a bit more. But it's worth it in the long run because all these farmers and all these fishermen know that we do not use anything but the Louisiana crawfish.

01:25:28

SR: Well and you're helping your town, really, in the end?

01:25:31

DV: That's right.

01:25:32

SR: Do you have any of your recipes written down?

01:25:36

DV: I have quite a few of them. My youngest daughter took it over and she said, *Mama, can I have it?* And then every once in a while I want one and so she types it up for me and then I give it to somebody, yeah.

01:25:51

SR: Is there a Ruby's cookbook in the future?

01:25:53

DV: I'm hoping there would be, yeah.

01:25:59

SR: So much of this food, though—it seems like is very personal, you know, like the way that you described the browning of the meat and the making of a gravy.

01:26:10

DV: It's hard to release all your secret touches. It is because pretty soon every one of them would be using the same thing, you know, and doing it the same way.

01:26:24

SR: Well, but I'm not sure that you could teach somebody through a book the patience of making a gravy like that.

01:26:32

DV: No.

01:26:33

SR: Well one thing that we ask in these interviews is: What do you think is the future of the restaurant? But it sort of seems like—well, you've mentioned that you'd like to expand and the ownership is pretty new. They're in it for the long haul, you think—the boys?

01:26:49

DV: In the—what, baby?

01:26:51

SR: They're in it for the long haul?

01:26:53

DV: Yeah, yeah.

01:26:55

SR: Yeah, they'd like to expand.

01:26:56

DV: I'm hoping. **[Laughs]** Yeah, and I hope that I can see them just about all the way through.

Of course I'm 77, so—but I still have a lot of willpower for rise and go.

01:27:15

SR: For Mardi Gras here, do you do anything special with the restaurant?

01:27:19

DV: Well yes. In front of here we usually have a tent up and we have some cooking things out there and which we serve the chicken breast on a stick with—we marinate it two or three days ahead of time and we pass them in our own batter, we deep fry them, and then we put a roll on it, and so people can eat while they're walking. They go bananas.

01:27:54

We also have sausage on a stick, which that goes pretty well too. And then we have shrimps on a stick. It goes very well. And then we have our gumbo, and then we have all our etouffées, and if they want it we serve them out here and they can come in here and eat it because you can't walk with a liquid, you know, and—.

01:28:25

SR: When they're walking—do you have parades or what are they seeing?

01:28:28

DV: There is a parade on the Sunday before Mardi Gras. It's the small Mardi Gras, the young kids, but then they have a big parade Mardi Gras Day. But there's--they're going to have different bands at the end, right here, of this street, and Mr. Fred Charlie gets different bands on each day, which I brought them the schedule today. And--and then in front of the City Hall they have one, but each different place has different bands and everybody is dancing on the streets and drinking and—.

01:29:10

SR: Well you've given me a lot of your time. I appreciate it.

01:29:16

DV: Thank you, thank you.

01:29:20

SR: And I appreciate everything I've eaten at Ruby's, too. It's been great.

01:29:22

DV: Well thank you. Thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

01:29:25

SR: Thank you for your time.

01:29:28

DV: Glad you enjoyed it and hope you'll come again.

01:29:31

[End Dot Virdrine Interview]