

**FRANK & LUCINDA MITCHELL**  
**Mitchell's Fruit Stand (closed)—New Orleans, LA**

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Date: May 9, 2012

Location: Sara Roahen's residence—New Orleans, LA

Interviewer: Sara Roahen

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 1 hour, 36 minutes

Project: Ya-Ka-Mein in New Orleans

00:00:02

**Sara Roahen:** This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's May 9, 2012. I'm in New Orleans, Louisiana, on Constance Street, and I'm sitting here having coffee with Frank and Lucinda Mitchell. And I'll ask them to introduce themselves. We'll start with you, Mr. Mitchell. Could you please tell me your full name—and I know you're retired now, but what your occupation was or has been?

00:00:28

**Frank Mitchell:** Okay, my name is Frank Sheldon Mitchell, Sr. I'm retired now from the produce business. Been doing that since 1973, and I miss it.

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**SR:** Mrs. Mitchell?

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**Lucinda Mitchell:** My name is Lucinda Mitchell, the mother of Mitchell's Fruit Stand. [Hearty Laugh] And I'm retired and miserable. I'm ready to go back to work and do something if I can sell but one banana. [Hearty Laugh] Let me sell that. I just enjoy talking to you, Sara.

00:01:17

**SR:** Well thank you. I'm thrilled to have you here. Could we start by both of you telling me where you're from and where you grew up?

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**LM:** I'm from Birmingham, Alabama. I was raised in New Orleans. My mother died when I was four or five years old. I don't quite remember. And my mother had the fruit stand by the hospital, and I was there with her until she passed. And it was already in my blood. I loved selling fruit, vegetables [pronounced veg-a-tables], sandwiches, and food, and that's what I did for the last—I'm sixty-nine. I'm going to be sixty-nine in December. I will be sixty-nine in December, but I been there ever since sixty-four, about sixty-five years.

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[Phone Rings] I'm going to cut it off. Don't worry about it.

00:02:24

**SR:** Okay, okay.

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**LM:** So that's what I been doing. That's what I enjoy doing, Sara.

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**SR:** I want to ask you some follow-up questions, but I neglected to ask you both to tell me your birth date, if you don't mind.

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**LM:** December 16, 1943.

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**FM:** September 13, 1942.

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**SR:** And while I'm over here, could I ask you where you grew up?

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**FM:** I grew up in the Treme section of New Orleans.

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**SR:** Well that's interesting to me, that your mother had the fruit stand. So when you say that she had the fruit stand by the hospital, what hospital do you mean?

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**LM:** Charity Hospital. That's where I grew up at. I'm part of Charity.

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**SR:** What do you mean by that?

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**LM:** I been here that long. Saw billions of people over the years, so I been there a long time. So it's just like when I leave my house in the morning when I was working by Charity—Charity

was my home because that's where I stopped at and stayed there for fifteen and sixteen hours a day. So that's my home.

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**SR:** How did your mother wind up there from Birmingham?

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**LM:** Well she moved here to New Orleans. But she was from—that's not my mother; that's my great-great aunt. My mother died when I was four or five years old. My great-great aunt raised me. And she started with a cart and buggy, pushing around the city and selling fruit. Then they got a horse carriage. That didn't last but maybe a couple years [Laughs] because she bought a truck and went over there by the hospital. They got it—ran her back and forth. The police would harass her. So she would go back again, and she kept going back until in 19—I think that was 1969 or 1970, they gave us vendor zoning.

00:04:37

So she was at home sick during that time, but I was working on the stand because I had my own stand out there. And I applied for vendor zoning number one. So they wind up giving her vendor zoning number one, and I was finally vendor zoning number three. I applied for vendor zoning number three. And when she passed, both vendor zones was put in my name because my name was already on there over the years, you know, when they first started out giving zones. We was the first ones that said it to get vendor zones, one of the first.

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And I just stayed there.

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**SR:** What do you mean? So you both—you each had a vending zone. Did you have your own stands?

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**LM:** Yes, yes. But my name was—when she passed my name was already on her vendor zone. So they give me two vendor zones.

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**SR:** Did you sell the same things?

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**LM:** Just about. Just about.

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**SR:** So you were competitors?

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**LM:** Yeah, and I'm a shrewd competitor because I be behind that money. I be working.

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**SR:** What was your great-great aunt's name?

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**LM:** Lucinda [Laughs]. Lucinda Moss. But they used to call her Mary Dixon or Mary Moore.

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**SR:** Why?

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**LM:** Girlfriend, I don't know. She had about two or three different names. But her real name was Lucinda Moss. But her business name was Lucinda Moss—I mean Mary Moore and Mary Dixon.

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**SR:** Hmm. Just to sort of clarify things in my head, did you come to New Orleans when your mother passed away to live with your aunt? Is that how you came?

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**LM:** No. My aunt came and got me and brought me here. And I been here ever since.

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**SR:** So you must have been working the fruit stand when y'all met?

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**LM:** No, not really. I had got married and had babies. And when I met him—I met Frank. And I went and got a truck and it's already in my blood, Sara, so he bought me a truck. And my husband bought me a truck and I just went on to work. [Laughs] That's what happened. You know I was just—me and my mom was the only—we was in the city out there working on a truck because they didn't want—. You know womens didn't do that back then. They was embarrassed. The only thing that was embarrassing to me: when I didn't have no money. Now I was embarrassed then because I don't like to ask somebody for nothing. So I mean I went to work and stayed there.

00:07:44

**SR:** Mr. Mitchell, what did your parents do for a living? How did you come up?

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**FM:** My dad was a musician and my mother was a seamstress. And a good cook, I might add.

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**LM:** Yeah, she was.

00:08:03

**SR:** What kind of musician was your father?

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**FM:** He was a trumpet player. His name is Frank Mitchell also. He's well known in the city of New Orleans, uh-hm.

00:08:11

**SR:** So you came up in the musical neighborhood with the musician father?

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**FM:** I sang for a long time, but some things happened that I saw in the business side of it and I sort of just left it alone.

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**SR:** Then as a young man, what did you do for work?

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**FM:** Well my very first job was at Roger's [pronounced Ru-gere's] Grocery Store as a delivery person and stock person. That's in the Bayou St. John area. And I worked there. And then my second job was as an orderly—they called it orderlies then; they didn't call it nursing assistant like they call it now—at Charity Hospital. And I worked there until I got drafted into the military. And then when I came back out I worked at Public Health Hospital, which used to be on State and Tchoupitoulas [streets]. It's closed now. And then from there I worked offshore, and then from offshore I worked at the VA Hospital. And one day my wife came home and told me she made one hundred dollars. And I left the VA Hospital and never went back again.

00:09:39

**LM:** [Hearty Laugh] Money changed us. Money changed us, Sara. We had seven children to feed, and twenty dollars, we wasn't going to do it. So then I had five girls, and girls cost a lot of money. I was on that sewing machine half of the night sewing, and working all day long. That's what I did. And Frank came there sometime, and then after a while he was coming every day [Laughs].

00:10:12

**SR:** Right. So you made one hundred dollars at the truck, and he said, "All right, I need to get into that business"—?

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**LM:** Yeah, because he—. But out of the hundred dollars you got to spend, what? Thirty dollars, forty dollars to buy the fruit. So you really didn't make one hundred dollars, but I mean he saw one hundred dollars. He didn't know what you got to do with that hundred dollars. So I had to teach him about that business. Or, I knew—let me tell you something. You know when you first get in business you don't know nothing about a business. You think you know but you don't know. And it cost money to stay in—to keep a business rolling. And if you spend up your capital, you ain't got no money.

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So you got to learn how to not spend your capital because you're getting excited about the money, right? And you go and—and I did that a couple of times: spent the capital and had to go get the fruits on credit because, you know, I'm excited. But after a while I knew from then

that I had to—. Then I had to—. I'll tell you what else I did. I used to sell the fruit for what I paid for it. How in the world you going to do that? [Hearty Laugh] Because the people come there and tell you, "Oh, that's too high." And I want to keep that customer so I'm going to drop that fruit down. Dropped that fruit down, and I just had barely enough to go get the fruit for the next day. I was working for nothing. So I had to bring that fruit up because I couldn't compare myself to—at that time Schwegmann's—or none of them other stores, because they're buying a volume, a big volume of fruit, so they're going to get a cheap price. They could sell it cheaper than I could. I had to buy one box of this and maybe one box of that, or two of this and two that, but I couldn't buy that volume. But my fruits was fresher because I get them every day or every other day, you know. And they tasted better. They wasn't refrigerated until—because, see, fruits in the supermarket stay refrigerated so long they don't have no taste.

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You know you think you got the big beautiful apple there, or orange there, and when you open it up to eat that fruit you don't have no taste. But you eat one of my fruits, you got a taste because it's fresher and it's not sitting in a refrigerator. So that's the difference.

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**SR:** Right. Yours weren't in the refrigerator at all, right? You had them out just on the street?

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**LM:** Yeah. You see, I put them out for that day. I'd buy enough for that day. And I had to go to market every morning. So when I sold out of that half a box of apples, I didn't have no more apples. You know what I'm saying? But if you go buy three or four boxes of this and three or

four boxes of that, you got to start throwing that stuff out at the dump because you ain't got nowhere to keep it. You either bring it back to the market and put it in their cooler—. That's what we had to wind up doing when it got so rough for us for the stuff that's going bad. So you know it's a big difference than buying stuff back at the supermarket. They buy a whole—one hundred cases of apples, one hundred boxes of bananas, and I dare you to go buy that and try to sell it. [Hearty Laugh]

00:13:29

**SR:** Where were you buying your produce?

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**LM:** Well the French Market. See at that time they had a whole lot of stalls out there selling fruits and vegetables. See now they got a flea market out there; you might see one place that sells fruits. Right, one now, Frank?

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**FM:** That's all. Besides that it was a short time we went out there.

00:13:51

**LM:** No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking right now.

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**FM:** Well there's one produce company in the market itself, and that's Tyler's [Tyler's Pride Produce].

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**LM:** Yeah, Tyler's.

00:14:00

**FM:** All the rest of them, they moved out. Well they had their trucks; they couldn't park their trucks. They was starting to give tickets. They was putting tickets on their truck for being parked out there.

00:14:09

**LM:** Yeah. But before that, Frank, them people put all them flea markets in there and ran all the vendors out of the market. Then they remodeled it so—they remodeled it so bad until it was just nowhere for the people to come to sell that fruit. The problem is right now—right now, Sara, is that they made more money off the flea market than they made off the fruit stand. That's the difference. They don't have fruit stands in the market. They ain't got but one fruit stand, and that's at the—

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**FM:** At the beginning.

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**LM:** —at the beginning, one or two, but it don't have—. Like the people used to come in and back their truck in there and come with their produce and—. But now you got to go and unload the damn truck. You got to unload it, set the stuff up there, go park it somewhere, you know. And then most of us—because when I did it—we're older, so you don't want to be unloading no truck and go park it and then you got to pay twenty-five dollars for half a stall.

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**FM:** Twenty-five dollars for the stall.

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**LM:** Yeah.

00:15:18

**SR:** Twenty-five dollars?

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**FM:** Per day.

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**SR:** Per day for the stall?

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**LM:** For the stall.

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**FM:** Eight dollars to park. So you're—what you're looking at, thirty-three dollars before you make a quarter.

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**LM:** Yeah, so that's another thing. The vendors can't do that. The fruit people, they can't come out there. And most people that's got those stands, they're paying through the nose. It's hard to survive.

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**SR:** If you had your fruit stand right now, where would you buy your produce?

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**LM:** Over by AJ's Produce Company, because I been dealing with him for over fifty years, so I'd go there. He's a nice person.

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**SR:** Tell me a little bit about the kinds of things that you sold at your stand.

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**LM:** All of the fruits—all of the fruits are—

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**FM:** We used to get some fruits. The salesman of fruit was coming directly from California. We got good fruit. But then it started shipping—instead of west to south, they started shipping west to east from California. So we just didn't get the type of fruit that we used to get. We used to get nectarines and peaches the size of softballs. Beautiful—beautiful grapes, and well, as we know California had the best produce. But you don't see that kind of fruit anymore. Most of the fruit is being imported from Chile and other places like that and they just—

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**LM:** They don't taste like—

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**FM:** —they just—and again, they don't hold up as long.

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**SR:** When did that shift happen, that things stopped coming directly from California?

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**FM:** In the early '70s, or late '70s I think.

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**LM:** When it changed over it was in the '80s, Frank.



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**FM:** Okay, well—

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**LM:** That was in the '80s. Yeah, I don't know exactly when, but you know stuff—the price started going up on them when they started shipping all over the United States, you know where I usually would go there and pay, what? Five dollars, three dollars for bananas?

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**FM:** Oh yeah, three dollars for a case of bananas. You could sell bananas—

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**LM:** Now bananas is twenty-one, twenty-two dollars a box, or maybe twenty-five dollars a box. So it's hard to be in the—you got to be crazy. [Laughs]

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**SR:** Did you ever get any Louisiana fruits?

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**LM:** Oh yeah. Our navel oranges, our satsumas, our mandarins.

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**FM:** Tangerines are called mandarins.

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**LM:** Yeah, mandarins. Satsumas. I got cabbage—the vegetables—cabbage, the greens. We had the best tasting vegetables in this area.

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**FM:** Snap beans.

00:18:24

**LM:** Cauliflower, snap beans, crowder peas, okra. We got the best vegetables. We got the best-tasting vegetables anywhere in the world because I done tried it everywhere. When I would go out there and buy it in the market, I'd usually go out to the supermarket and buy it—

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**FM:** It don't compare.

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**LM:** —it's no comparison, because I know what it tastes like. You know when you cook something, you know what it tastes like. I didn't try that other stuff—especially the cabbage.

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**FM:** Uh-hm. But Louisiana cabbage is the best. Honestly the best.

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**LM:** They sweet.

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**FM:** And there's also a type of green, they call it a "spinach green."

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**LM:** Spinach mustard.

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**FM:** Yeah, it's a mustard green and a spinach seed fused, and it's the best greens you will ever, ever [Emphasis Added] eat. The juice from it is—oh.

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**LM:** When I cook it—. Let me tell you what: I accidentally bought them greens. And they were so pretty I said—I went on and cooked them. You know I had all them children, so I must have cooked about a dozen of them. And I cooked them; I cooked them greens and they were so good. Frank said, "What's that? Where you got this from, Lu?" I said, "The market. They got a man come out there. They're bringing these spinach and mustards out there. I cooked them." Too many people don't know nothing about them, but they're here.

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**SR:** By a dozen, do you mean a dozen bunches?

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**LM:** Yeah, a dozen bunches. That's how I had to cook them. I had seven children and I had to feed them. My children love to eat.

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**SR:** How could you work and clean a dozen bunches of greens?

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**LM:** Easy, Girlfriend: you go out there and do what you got to do when you get off of work. You go there, you clean them. And you sit up there in the sink [pronounced zinc] and you wash them about four or five times to get all that dirt off of them and sprinkle some salt on them so you can get the worms out of them. And you wash them and clean them and put them in that plastic bag, and the next day you cook them.

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**SR:** Do it ahead of time?

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**LM:** Yes. We all got to work. Well that's how I cook my food, ahead of time. I cook all my vegetables—and at that time we didn't have no Ziploc bags or plastic bags. I had containers I used to put my food in and put it in the freezer because I always wanted my children to have fresh vegetables, right. So I would cook up that food on Saturday or Sunday because I had to

work Saturday and Sunday too. So—you know I had to cook. So I'd cook up on Saturday and cook up some on Sunday and I'd put them in the freezer. Cook enough up so whenever—on the weekdays all I had to do was have my chicken or my chops, or cook my rice and my cornbread or my biscuits—what I got to go with whatever I'm cooking. My food was already cooked because I cooked—I didn't cook in no small pot. I had a pot like that. [Gestures] I had one of them great big old pots. That's how I cook. If I fry chicken, I didn't fry no one chicken. I had to fry three or four. So they would walk through the house and they were some greedy children.  
[Hearty Laugh]

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**FM:** Well we also—we also had six nieces and nephews that would be by our house, too.

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**LM:** I would stay in food.

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**FM:** So it's—yeah, when you came in the house—when you came into the house you had to just start stepping over people. That's how many people would be in the house.

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**LM:** Yeah, they would come; they wouldn't want to go home. I don't know why they stayed, because I cut up so bad.

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**SR:** Because you were cooking like that. That's why.

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**LM:** Yeah, I was feeding—you know me, I feed everybody. And then I had my next door neighbor and she had five girls and she had to work two jobs, too, so I would have her five girls over there along with my seven and along with my sister's seven—

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**FM:** We had a houseful.

00:22:12

**LM:** —that was fourteen. And the five next door, that was nineteen. And then I had my nieces and nephews come down there every summer.

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**FM:** From Dallas.

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**LM:** From Dallas. So I had about two or three of them in there. So I mean, you know, we just—I had a good time. [Hearty Laugh]

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**SR:** Where were you living when you were raising your children?

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**LM:** 2732 Main Street.

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**FM:** Which is a lot now.

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**SR:** Oh, the house isn't there anymore?

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**FM:** The stone. There was this huge pecan tree. I mean huge. It was—see, like this pine tree you have out here [Gestures]?

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**SR:** Uh-hm.

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**FM:** It was four times the size of that trunk.

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**LM:** Fell on the house.

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**FM:** And it was at least about anywhere like thirty feet high or so. And the branches from it would come over the roof of our house. And during the summer, I don't know whether it was Rita or Katrina, the tree blew over. And I mean it just knocked all the bricks, knocked the second floor down to the first floor. It just—. And we bought it—when we bought that house we just—we renovated it and made it out of—. It was a camelback. And we brought the front part of the camel out and then the back part of the camel out. But I miss that old house.

00:23:39

**SR:** Wait. What do you mean the—. Tell me again what you just said. The front part out and the back part out?

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**FM:** Yeah, it was a camelback. Like the old-time New Orleans camelbacks, and what we did is we tore the roof off the front part and extended it out, and then we tore the roof off—. Well it didn't have no roof on the back part. We just came up and connected it to the back of the camel. And we had a huge house. We had to have a huge house.

00:24:12

**SR:** Can you tell me for the record—because a lot of people who aren't familiar with New Orleans architecture won't know what a camelback is. Can you describe what that is for me?



00:24:20

**FM:** Okay. It's a—you have a high roof, okay, and then you have a low roof, and you have a low roof in the back of it, so the high roof and the two low roofs gives it the name “camelback.” That's how they name it a camelback. Just a regular shotgun house. But they had a second floor, and then you had a lower roof in the front and a lower roof in the back, so they called it “camelback.”

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**SR:** So it's just the second floor is not as big as the first floor, right?

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**FM:** The second floor is like two bedrooms and a bathroom. Something like that upstairs.

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**SR:** Did that have something to do with how people paid taxes? Or how did that come about, that people started building that way?

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**FM:** That's just an architectural design that came out years ago.

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**SR:** So you lived there until after Katrina?

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**FM:** Yeah, we moved before Katrina.

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**SR:** Oh, you moved before Katrina?

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**LM:** Yeah.

00:25:28

**FM:** Yeah, we moved before Katrina.

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**LM:** Because all the children was gone and nobody there but me and Frank, and it's 7,700 square foot. So, "Let me get out of this."

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**FM:** We really—

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**SR:** Seventy-seven hundred?

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**LM:** That's about how large the house was.

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**SR:** Well that's a lot of cleaning.

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**LM:** I didn't do all that cleaning.

00:25:52

**SR:** You had kids?

00:25:52

**LM:** I had them working and I had Frank working, and you know I did my share. We all just pitched in and kept it up because, I mean, they have to keep it up because I—. Number one, my kitchen had to be like this: clean. My bathroom has got to be sparkling. So keep my kitchen on top and I'll leave you alone. If you keep my kitchen clean and keep my bathrooms clean. Okay, I'll let you go with the rooms, you know. You can get away with your room coming in maybe once a week and picking—you can pick up all your clothes and hang them up and put them up. But the most important thing in my house has always been my kitchen and my bathroom. Because if I go in the kitchen and I got to cook—I got to clean, I got to wash dishes, that ain't going to work.

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But if I got to work just before I cook, everybody in trouble. [Hearty Laugh]

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**SR:** I like that philosophy. So we've been talking—so basically you raised your kids with the fruit stand?

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**LM:** Yes. Yes, yes, because I was a worker. I was the one that ran the stands and worked the stands. My husband backed me up one hundred percent whatever I got into. [Laughs] He was right there.

00:27:00

**FM:** I had jobs. I knew a lot of contractors, paint contractors and stuff like that, and I worked for real estate companies maintaining their properties and everything else like that. It was not steady work, but it was work.

00:27:19

**LM:** Yeah, he was—

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**SR:** You were a renaissance man?

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**FM:** You could say that. [Laughs] You could say that.

00:27:24

**LM:** Yeah.

00:27:25

**SR:** Well so far we've been talking about your business as a fruit stand, but it was much more than that when I discovered it, which was around 1999. You made food there and sold prepared food.

00:27:42

**LM:** Yes.

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**SR:** Did you always do that, or was that something that happened later?

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**LM:** That happened later because I had to get a truck and get it built so I could cook in there.

00:27:55

**FM:** And then we had to get the petition signed, remember?

00:27:58

**LM:** No, that didn't do that. That didn't do that. The truck—they tried to bar me from doing that, from selling food.

00:28:11

**SR:** Who is “they”?

00:28:12

**LM:** City Hall, breathing down my back, but in my—what’s the name of that thing, Frank?

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**FM:** Which one?

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**LM:** When I had this—they had to read my contract with the city?

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**FM:** Ordinance.

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**LM:** Ordinance, yeah ordinance. And the ordinance didn't have no—I didn't have no regulation in my ordinance, in mine. And now if you was over in Claiborne Street—

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**FM:** You wouldn't have been allowed to do that.

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**LM:** —you wouldn't be allowed to do that. You had to go—anywhere in the city, you couldn't do that. I was the only person in the city that had the rights to sell that because they didn't set up no rules for me.

00:28:54

**SR:** Okay, you had the rights to sell what?

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**LM:** Food, fruits—

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**FM:** Snacks, soda.

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**LM:** —snacks, soda—

00:29:01

**FM:** Coffee.

00:29:01

**LM:** —coffee. Because I didn't—I was grandfather cloused in like that.

00:29:07

**SR:** Okay.

00:29:07

**LM:** Other than that, I wouldn't have been able to do that. But every business owner in the city of New Orleans only had to go by their rules. But when they drew up the rules they didn't write them up for me. I was grandfathered in with no rules.

00:29:28

**SR:** So when you decided to—when you got the truck and decided to make prepared food, you were just allowed or you had to fight your way?

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**LM:** I been fighting with City Hall for over fifty years. [Hearty Laugh]

00:29:41

**FM:** The state health system. It seemed to me that every administration, any new director of the hospital, had a problem with those trucks out there. So many things that was going on inside the hospital really went undone worrying about what we was doing out there in the elements.

00:30:13



**LM:** We was working in the rain, the snow, the cold, the sun, the heat—freezing to death—and you worried about what I'm doing? Tend to your business; take care of that hospital and leave us alone. But they didn't do it like that. They worried about what we was doing and what we were selling, you know.

00:30:26

**FM:** But we were the only business establishment that had a health inspection every day at lunchtime.

00:30:37

**LM:** Yeah, I had to go to the lawyer for that. I had to go get a lawyer for that because they would come there every day at lunchtime, the health department, to check my truck.

00:30:46

**FM:** And you know something is going to be out of place at lunchtime, so they wrote us up. Finally we went to court on it and the judge threw it out and that really steamed them. I mean that really steamed them. I don't know what it was. I don't know what it was.

00:31:05

**LM:** I still don't understand. If a city is going to make money, why mess with the people that are going to get out there working and trying to make a dollar and bring y'all two dollars of taxes? Why?

00:31:14

**SR:** Do you think maybe the hospital didn't want competition for the cafeteria?

00:31:19

**LM:** The cafeteria wasn't—huh. The cafeteria—

00:31:22

**FM:** People wasn't eating that institutionalized stuff.

00:31:25

**LM:** They wanted that fresh food, that fresh food that I was cooking. That's what the people wanted and I did that. But then they started to put a rumor out about the roach. You remember that?

00:31:40

**FM:** What that was?

00:31:41

**LM:** The roach in the back.

00:31:42

**FM:** Magazine, some kind of magazine it was—

00:31:47

**LM:** We got that magazine, don't we Frank?

00:31:48

**FM:** I think I have it at home.

00:31:50

**LM:** Yeah, I think I have that magazine.

00:31:50

**FM:** A big negative write-up just after you did that *Gambit* [*Gambit Weekly* newspaper] article on us, they came up with a negative article.

00:31:59

**LM:** Yeah.

00:32:01

**FM:** I'm going to bring it to you. *Liquid, Liquid* was the name of the magazine.

00:32:03

**SR:** I've never heard of that.

00:32:06

**LM:** Came out with that.

00:32:07

**FM:** Another fly-by-night. It was—

00:32:09

**LM:** But listen. They was so busy watching me until the snack bar in front of me opened up for over ten years for the—for the blind, right?

00:32:18

**FM:** Yeah.

00:32:20

**LM:** Yeah; yeah.

00:32:21

**SR:** Wait, what?

00:32:22

**FM:** And they gave me—

00:32:22

**LM:** They opened up a snack bar right there in front of me.

00:32:25

**SR:** Who did?

00:32:26

**FM:** East Pavilion. You know the little place, the little restaurant right in front of the hospital there. It used to be a visitor—that's when the hospital was segregated. They had one side for blacks to register for to go visit their people, and they had one side for whites to get their passes to go see their people. So one of them, they made—they just made one side for everybody then and then they opened up the East Pavilion Restaurant, which was through the blind system. And their places was normally closed at 4 o'clock. This was a special thing that they came up with opened twenty-four hours.

00:33:20

**LM:** Yeah, seven days a week.

00:33:21

**FM:** Now I mean, do the math on that. You know you could figure out what the objective was.

00:33:27

**LM:** And then they had the nerve—then they had the nerve to be picking on me and they're sitting in there eating out at the filthiest place in the city. Rats running rampant. I mean—

00:33:37

**FM:** We had a daughter working—two daughters worked at that when they first opened it up.

00:33:41

**LM:** That place was filthy.

00:33:42

**FM:** I had one that worked as a cashier. She's in Las Vegas now. And one was a cook.

00:33:48

**LM:** A sandwich maker.

00:33:50

**SR:** They were working at the East Pavilion?

00:33:52

**LM:** Yeah. Yeah, I didn't care. I didn't care because whoever came there to buy some fruit bought some fruit. They used to try sell fruit in there. They couldn't do it. They couldn't do it. They tried to sell apple candies in there. They couldn't do it. I'm the first one that started selling chicken wings—plates. They started selling chicken wing plates. My truck was sparkling clean. Their place was filthy. You'd go there early in the morning the rats would run across the counter.

00:34:25

**FM:** They'd have so many rats around—

00:34:28

**LM:** And then it was filthy. They'd take and throw the grease—

00:34:31

**FM:** The garbage.

00:34:32

**LM:** —the garbage in the back. They had a little thing around it.

00:34:36

**FM:** A little fence.

00:34:37

**LM:** Yeah, filthy, filthy, filthy. Water in it; it was just filthy. The Health Department come in, right. The Health Department wrote them up over one hundred times and it ain't did no good.

00:34:47

**FM:** That's right.

00:34:47

**LM:** I don't know how they stayed open.

00:34:48

**FM:** It was state-connected. That's the only thing I can come up with, is it was state-connected.

00:34:54

**LM:** I couldn't stay open selling stuff like that—filthy like that, nasty like that, treating the customers—. I mean these rats running across there in this place. These are not no mice; these are big old rats.

00:35:07

**FM:** I mean rats. Rats. They actually made a home.

00:35:11

**LM:** But you know rats was already—but rats was already at Charity Hospital. They was already there. They been there for years. Ever since I could remember there's been big rats there. But with the food, it drawed them closer. You got more.

00:35:21

**FM:** More.

00:35:26

**LM:** But why you worried about me and they got these rats running around there and it's filthy and nasty back there? You know what I mean? How you worried about me and you feeding these



people the—? And the people go in there and eat and watch the rats, some of them. They'd go, "I just saw that rat." Well if you saw the rats, why you going to sit there and eat that food?

00:35:42

**SR:** Well it never put you out of business, right?

00:35:44

**LM:** No. [Emphasis Added]

00:35:45

**FM:** No.

00:35:45

**LM:** I'm a fighter. I don't just give up like that. You know I just don't—

00:35:50

**FM:** You know when you have a good product you don't have—you shouldn't—. It's no problem.

00:35:57

**LM:** But see, I'm going to buy the best fruit. I'm going to buy the top-of-the-line fruit. I'm going to sell the best food and I'm going to keep the cleanest area.

00:36:07

**SR:** It was. I can vouch for it.

00:36:10

**LM:** Yeah, right. [Laughs]

00:36:10

**SR:** Can you talk to me a little bit about the prepared foods that you made, what your menu was like?

00:36:16

**LM:** Well let's see. I had hamburgers, hot sausage, roast beef, luncheon meat, ham. I had a variety of sandwiches.

00:36:31

**FM:** Liver cheese.

00:36:33

**LM:** Liver cheese. But just a variety of sandwiches that I made. My pot was like maybe greens, red beans, okra, fresh okra—

00:36:47

**FM:** Butter beans.

00:36:50

**LM:** —butter beans.

00:36:51

**FM:** Black-eyed peas.

00:36:50

**LM:** Black-eyed peas. I had all kind of food. One day we had red beans. One day we had mustard greens. We had collard greens. It was all fresh.

00:37:05

**SR:** You had some seafood too, right?

00:37:07

**LM:** Oh lord, I used to go get my shrimps fresh and dice them.

00:37:13

**FM:** And we would take—we would prepare our own seafood. We'd get them fresh.

00:37:18

**LM:** Yeah.

00:37:20

**FM:** Clean them, de-vein them, and you know just freeze them and have them to sell.

00:37:29

**SR:** Where did you get your seafood?

00:37:31

**FM:** Oh we'd go down to either Lafourche Parish or Plaquemines Parish, Venice, Cocodrie. Just all along the Gulf Coast where they sold seafood.

00:37:45

**LM:** I don't like frozen. I don't like—still today, I don't like frozen food, frozen shrimps. Fresh shrimps is the best tasting shrimps you ever ate. Have you tasted them, Sara?

00:37:54

**SR:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And I had the shrimp po-boy from you.

00:37:57

**LM:** Yeah, that was fresh. Yeah.

00:38:00

**FM:** We had a doctor who followed us from Charity and when we went down to University [Hospital]; he bought one shrimp po-boy from us when we was down by Charity. And he found us just like you found us. [Laughs] He found us.

00:38:16

**LM:** Sara?

00:38:16

**FM:** He had to have it.

00:38:17

**LM:** A lot of doctors and nurses came back because they knew what we had. I had thousands of people come back because they knew what we had. If I tell you I don't have no shrimps, it's because I could find no fresh shrimps. If I ain't got no fresh shrimps I'll get in my little car and drive all the way to—

00:38:38

**FM:** Port Sulphur or Venice.

00:38:39

**LM:** We'd go get them. I'd go get them. [Laughs] That's how crazy I am. [Hearty Laugh]

00:38:46

**FM:** And Dr. McSwain—he's the best in the emergency room, trauma doctor—his favorite was the hot sausage on the bun, and he'd stand at the back door and watch me make it or watch my wife make it.

00:39:05

**LM:** Yeah, and you know what else I cooked? I got a special on hamburgers. I could cook—I could make a hamburger that would make you want to not stop eating hamburgers because I season my hamburgers and I marinade all—if I season it today, you're not going to get it today because I'm going to season it.

00:39:24

**SR:** So you season it and then let it sit for a day?

00:39:26

**LM:** Yeah, let it sit in the juice. That's the best hamburger on a French—and on a po-boy, and I don't mean the soft po-boy but—

00:39:36

**FM:** Binder's Bakery shop right across from Loretta, that's where we get—

00:39:45

**LM:** No, no, no.

00:39:47

**FM:** No, Leidenheimer.

00:39:48

**LM:** Leidenheimer. Boy, they cook. They got the best French bread in the world.

00:39:53

**SR:** Would they deliver to you or did you have to go get it?

00:39:56

**LM:** I'd go get it.

00:39:57

**FM:** We'd go get them.

00:39:58

**SR:** How long were you shopping before your day started?

00:40:02

**LM:** Well I had set everything up—you know, see—. Wait, Frank. When I'd get in in the morning, I'd go there and get my—go get my fruit, set that up, just because I got to get my fruit ready. Then I would run out there and get my French bread. What-you-call-him would deliver it to us. What's his name?

00:40:22

**FM:** Eric.

00:40:25

**LM:** Eric at Leidenheimer would drop that French bread off that morning fresh and crusty. Girl, that's the best sandwich. That's how people blow up in New Orleans. [Laughs]

00:40:34

**SR:** Yeah, that's how they blow up?

00:40:35

**LM:** Yeah. [Hearty Laugh]

00:40:40

**SR:** And then—well, you haven't mentioned the reason that we're talking today—what you sold.

00:40:47

**LM:** That was the top of the line. I took my time with that too because you want to get that taste. You want everything to taste—it's that taste that makes you want to keep buying it.

00:41:04



**SR:** Well now, can you explain for me—for people who aren't from New Orleans who will be reading this and listening to this—what the ya-ka-mein is?

00:41:13

**LM:** It's roast beef, spaghettis, green onion, and egg, and a sauce that I put together personally. That's ya-ka-mein and it's delicious.

00:41:31

**SR:** It's interesting you say a sauce because I think of it as a soup. Do you think of it as a soup or not?

00:41:38

**LM:** Yeah, a soup. A soup. It's a soup, but it's something that I put together over the last thirty years because, you know, just like making the candy apples, the first five years I made candy apples I had to patent down on how to do it and get the taste and the crunchiness and it won't stick to your teeth and stuff. So I had to work on that until I got it right. I worked on that ya-ka-mein until I got it right.

00:42:04

**SR:** You're not from New Orleans. Did you grow up eating that dish?

00:42:12

**LM:** Ya-ka-mein?

00:42:12

**SR:** In Alabama?

00:42:13

**LM:** No. Uh-uh, no, no, no. I been here since I was five years old, so I ate ya-ka-mein right here. The first ya-ka-mein I ate was by—. What's the name of that place over there that was by the hospital?

00:42:30

**FM:** Pinky's?

00:42:31

**LM:** Yeah, he died.

00:42:32

**FM:** Yeah, Pinky's. Pinky died.

00:42:33

**SR:** Pinky's?

00:42:33

**FM:** Yeah, he had a little restaurant.

00:42:37

**LM:** Yeah, and he had ya-ka-mein, and then he passed. But that's the first place I ate ya-ka-mein. And it was just plain, so I would—a real cook, when they taste something, you kind of taste what they got in there. If you've cooked long enough. So I tasted it. I liked it, but it didn't have enough seasoning to me. You know, so I started working on it. I went to making them at home. I had my husband and all the children eating ya-ka-mein [Laughs] and shrimp fried rice.

00:43:12

**FM:** We sold that also, shrimp fried rice also; we made the shrimp fried rice. We made it fresh though.

00:43:18

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

00:43:21

**SR:** How old were you, do you think, when you had your first ya-ka-mein at Pinky's?

00:43:27

**LM:** Let me see. I must have been around nine--ten years old.

00:43:34

**SR:** So talk to me a little bit about how you worked on it and things that you figured out to make it taste better.

00:43:42

**LM:** Well I figured I don't—you got to get the right type of meat. That's number one. Then you got to marinade it, you know, about three or four days—or a week or maybe two weeks. It takes a while to make a ya-ka-mein. You can't do a good ya-ka-mein and put it together the day—and sell it today. It ain't going to work. You got to take the longest, and then you got to use a certain type of meat to make that ya-ka-mein.

00:44:14

**SR:** What do you mean by roast beef? What cut of meat is that?

00:44:18

**LM:** Well I like steak. I like to buy the steak. It tastes so good. But it costs so much money.

00:44:30

**SR:** Yeah, so probably when you were making it in the truck you weren't using steak, right?

00:44:36

**LM:** Sometime I did. Yeah, sometimes I did because I would buy me one and I'd want to make me a steak and get me a steak. [Laughs] Get me a ribeye and cook it. [Coughs] Marinade it and—I need some more water.

00:44:55

**SR:** Oh, let me pause this and get some water.

00:44:57

**LM:** Yeah.

00:45:01

**SR:** So we just took a little water break, but during the water break we were talking about how Mrs. Mitchell has a hard time cooking in small quantities.

00:45:09

**LM:** Oh god, that's a hard job. I mess it up by over-seasoning it. I mess up because I cooked for seven children and then I—and cooked for all these people in New Orleans and all around in Louisiana period. I done fed so many people. I mean millions. Not no one, two, three—

00:45:32

**SR:** Do you even have a small pot?

00:45:33

**LM:** I got one. Everything is gigantic. When I get some money first thing I got to do is buy me a set of pots and learn how to cook small portions. That's the first thing I need to do, because poor little me, I'll be so messed up.

00:45:48

**SR:** Yeah, well your husband said that you tend to over-cook.

00:45:50

**LM:** He know what I do. [Hearty Laugh] He know what I do. He know I be trying to get something small. Look, I'll be in there peeling garlic, right. Peel the whole clove of garlic and now listen at this. Now you know this is crazy. Peel the whole clove of garlic—cooking beans now. I'm putting the whole clove of garlic [Hearty Laugh] in these beans. Now you know you don't need no whole clove of garlic in the beans. I been messed up again. I said, "Oh god, I messed up big. How am I going to get this straight? I can't straighten that out because it's already in there."

00:46:26

I said, "Jesus. I'll tell Frank." What's he going to do? Because he fusses at me every day about something. He finds something to fuss at me about. I said, "Now what's the matter Frank?" I be looking at him and say, "What's the matter?" I mean I'm human. I be trying to change. You know it. I'm trying. I'm not perfect. I'm trying. I been cooking all this food and will be waiting for Frank and my son to eat it all up, right.

00:46:54

**FM:** We're having something we hardly ever had: leftovers. We never had leftovers.

00:47:01

**LM:** But we got leftovers now. But I bring some to his brother, my daughter, Candy, and my granddaughter, Miracle, the one I waited ten years. I was—

00:47:19

**FM:** She's the same age with—what you call him, Tibo?

00:47:21

**SR:** Tibo, yes.

00:47:21

**FM:** She's the same age with Tibo.

00:47:25

**LM:** Yes, that's the love of my life.

00:47:27

**SR:** Where does she live?

00:47:29

**LM:** Right here.

00:47:32

**FM:** No, she lives in Slidell.

00:47:32

**LM:** Oh Slidell, sorry. That's Miracle.

00:47:36

**SR:** Aw, so she's almost three?

00:47:38

**LM:** No, she's almost four.

00:47:38

**SR:** Oh, she's almost four, okay.

00:47:42

**LM:** Yeah, she's almost four.

00:47:42

**SR:** And you call her Miracle because it took your daughter a while to have her?

00:47:46

**LM:** Oh yes, that's my little world. That's my little world. I got another one up there that live up there in Marble Falls, Texas, Makayla.



00:47:59

**SR:** Makayla?

00:47:59

**FM:** She came up in the house with us.

00:48:01

**LM:** Miracle and Makayla. And I got a set of twins that said, “Grandma, what did I do to you that you don’t like me?” [Hearty Laugh] That’s the twins. They’re intelligent. I said, “You didn’t do me nothing.” “Well, you treat—everything is for Makayla. You buy this for Makayla. You—.” This is what they told me, “Grandma, you buy this for Makayla, you buy that for Makayla. What about us?” I said, “Grandma will make sure she sends y’all something.” I forgot about all you children. I’m sure they ain’t going to forgive me.

00:48:35

**FM:** Yeah, those two are something—Honor and Majesty.

00:48:39

**SR:** Those are good names.

00:48:41

**FM:** Uh-hm, Honor and Majesty, that’s—

00:48:43

**LM:** Their mom and dad is very religious.

00:48:45

**FM:** And they were born—how far after [Hurricane] Katrina?

00:48:51

**LM:** Um—

00:48:52

**FM:** One week before Katrina.

00:48:55

**LM:** Before Katrina, they were—the twins happened on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

00:48:57

**SR:** In New Orleans?

00:48:57

**FM:** They was born here in New Orleans.

00:48:58

**LM:** Yes.

00:49:00

**FM:** Right at Touro.

00:49:02

**LM:** She had two babies—

00:49:03

**FM:** Then they had to leave.

00:49:04

**LM:** —and her and her husband said they—when I went up there, he was up there just as calm. I mean he's right on his wife, right. She's in there with two baby girls. He's standing right there. When I looked up, here come Katrina. So she nursed them twins. Leave out of town with them twins and go all over the United States—

00:49:26

**FM:** We don't see them. We don't see them until about a year later.

00:49:34

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

00:49:35

**FM:** About a year later when we saw them. They was in Marble Falls, Texas.

00:49:40

**SR:** Marble Falls?

00:49:42

**LM:** Yeah, a church—

00:49:43

**FM:** A beautiful place.

00:49:44

**LM:** —they up there with the church. All of them went. The pastor picked up everybody. I don't know where he come from, but he had everybody he took from his church [Laughs] and from their houses and he got a bus and brought all the people all over the United States, and they settled down in Marble Falls, Texas.

00:50:00

**SR:** That must have been difficult to be doing all that with newborn babies.

00:50:03

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

00:50:06

**FM:** She had kind of a—

00:50:08

**LM:** They had to move from one place to another.

00:50:08

**FM:** —they did caesarean on her, so she was—. I was really worried about them. I was really worried about her.

00:50:18

**SR:** I understand. Well, I do want to talk about Katrina and how that affected you, which I know it affected you profoundly. But I'm not finished with the ya-ka-mein.

00:50:28

**LM:** Go ahead, Girl.

00:50:30

**SR:** So tell me what you mean by “marinade.”

00:50:33

**LM:** Well you season it and you wrap it up with some foil and put it in the refrigerator—and not in the freezer—and just forget about it.

00:50:40

**FM:** It's the meat.

00:50:41

**LM:** It's the meat. And you take the sauce off the meat and make a gravy. I mean, you don't make a gravy; you use that to make the soup.

00:50:57

**SR:** So the juices that come out of the meat you use to make the broth?

00:51:01

**LM:** Yes. Yeah, yeah.

00:51:03

**SR:** What do you season the meat with?

00:51:06

**LM:** Garlic, everything. I can't give you all my secrets.

00:51:10

**SR:** No, but like dried seasonings?

00:51:13

**LM:** No, no. [Laughs] Didn't I tell you I don't use those?

00:51:23

**LM:** No, it's fresh seasoning.

00:51:25

**SR:** Ah.

00:51:27

**LM:** I got all kind of seasoning I put in there. It's my secret.

00:51:31

**SR:** Okay, now you've really got my interest up. So you might leave it in there for two weeks?

00:51:39

**LM:** Yeah.

00:51:39

**SR:** And it stays good?

00:51:40

**LM:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah, oh yeah. It be well-seasoned. That's why I tell you about a ya-ka-mein—that's what ya-ka-mein—. Did I ever tell you about that?

00:51:54

**SR:** No. What? Tell me.

00:51:55

**LM:** It's over a restaurant that sells nothing but ya-ka-mein.

00:52:02

**FM:** There's all different types you can make.

00:52:04

**LM:** They got beef.

00:52:04

**FM:** Chicken and beef—

00:52:05

**LM:** Pork.

00:52:07

**FM:** —pork. There's all different kinds.



00:52:08

**LM:** Chicken.

00:52:10

**FM:** But we like the beef better.

00:52:14

**LM:** I'm just telling you beef is one of the best. But the beef, the pork, the chicken—let me make sure I get through everything. Beef, pork, and chicken. They got three different kinds.

00:52:25

**SR:** What about seafood? Do you ever do seafood?

00:52:26

**LM:** I could do seafood but it—I got to find how to make that gravy for that seafood ya-ka-mein.

00:52:36

**FM:** It's a different—it's a different type of sauce.

00:52:39

**LM:** I might have to use the—. I got it. I got it. I got it. I got it.

00:52:48

**SR:** But you've never done that before?

00:52:49

**LM:** No, no, but I can do it if—but first I got to cook it up myself and see how I like it.

00:52:56

**SR:** So you marinate the meat. Is it already cut up when you marinate it?

00:52:59

**LM:** Oh no. No. No, no. I try to get that—it's a machine—out.

00:53:03

**SR:** Right. So I called you yesterday and you were telling me that you got the slicing machine out [Laughs]. I'm so sorry. So tell me about that.

00:53:13

**LM:** Well I had to sanitize it, clean it, oil it, turn it on and let it run for about a half an hour because it's been sitting up so long. My husband oiled it down. And I sanitized it and got my Brillo pad on it and worked on it until I got it cleaned back like I want it. But that's how I do with my pots, you know. You know I'm crazy like that, right.

00:53:37

**SR:** Oh, I need to get you over here on my pots. Don't look at my pots. So then do you slice it thinly, or why do you—?

00:53:45

**LM:** Very thin. Very thin, very thin, because you want to be able to chew that without chewing it for a half an hour. [Laughs] So you got to have it thin.

00:53:58

**SR:** Can tell me if there is a secret—and I'm asking too much—but do you brown the meat before you—?

00:54:06

**LM:** Now Girlfriend, you're going too far. [Laughs]

00:54:09

**FM:** [Laughs]

00:54:10

**SR:** Okay, well, let's talk about the noodles. What kind of noodles do you use?

00:54:13

**LM:** Any kind you feel like using. Any kind, no special kind. I like to get the little thin ones, you know. Not real thin, because you don't want—look at them pots.

00:54:27

**SR:** Let's see. I'm going to see what you have today.

00:54:30

**FM:** I think it's a number two—.

00:54:34

**LM:** They in a bag, plastic bag.

00:54:42

**SR:** Well I don't know what number that is. Yeah, but it's pretty thin.

00:54:45

**FM:** I think it's number two.

00:54:47

**SR:** It's thin but not angel-hair-thin.

00:54:48

**LM:** No, I can't stand angel hair.

00:54:51

**FM:** That's too thin.

00:54:51

**LM:** That's too thin for ya-ka-mein.

00:54:53

**FM:** It's supposed to be filling, too, now. It's not supposed to be a little light meal. It's supposed to fill you up.

00:55:01

**LM:** Well, Sara, you ate ya-ka-mein. Did it fill you up?

00:55:03

**SR:** Uh-hm.

00:55:05

**LM:** Okay.

00:55:05

**SR:** It fills you up. I mean the—you know, with the noodles and the meat and the egg. And the egg is always hardboiled, right?

00:55:12

**LM:** Yeah, yeah. You want to make that ya-ka-mein sometime?

00:55:17

**SR:** Yeah.

00:55:19

**LM:** We get off the record, we'll do that ya-ka-mein.

00:55:22

**SR:** Okay. [Laughs] And when you would make a portion to serve at your truck, would you put one egg in every serving or—?

00:55:30

**LM:** I put one egg in. I put a whole egg in. Some people use a half an egg, but I put a whole egg in there.

00:55:37

**SR:** Well, I don't know what else you can tell me. I'm asking for too many secrets, but—.

00:55:45

**LM:** Don't worry.

00:55:47

**FM:** Some people serve it with crackers, you know like they'll give you gumbo with crackers. Some people serve it like that, but Lucinda always serves it just like it was: egg, the beef, green onions, and the spaghetti, and the broth.

00:56:02

**SR:** The green onions is key, I think.

00:56:04

**LM:** That's good. I love me some green onions in my ya-ka-mein. And you know a lot of places put about—they put just a little few green onions in it, and I don't like it like that. Put me a handful of green onions in it and then it will taste good. It brings that taste to that ya-ka-mein. It'll bring out that taste.

00:56:27

**SR:** Yeah. I remember that about yours, that it had a lot of green onions in it.

00:56:30

**LM:** Yeah.

00:56:32

**SR:** So it's very filling. When do people eat it? I mean, was this a lunch that people would get for lunch, or would they get it—?

00:56:41

**FM:** Oh, any time.

00:56:43

**LM:** They don't have no special time. Some people eat it for breakfast. Some people eat it for supper. They just like ya-ka-mein.

00:56:49

**SR:** Well I'm kind of asking because I've heard that it's a hangover cure.

00:56:54

**LM:** No indeed unless you put some hot sauce in it.

00:56:57

**SR:** Well do you put hot sauce in yours or—?

00:56:59

**LM:** No, no. That's up to the person, you know, to put some Tabasco sauce or something in it—or cayenne pepper—but I don't put all that in there because it's going to take the taste of the ya-ka-mein.



00:57:11

**SR:** Would it bother you if people put all kinds of things in your ya-ka-mein?

00:57:16

**LM:** No, I don't care what they put in there. Once I done made it and you done give me my money, you can put whatever you want to put in there.

00:57:24

**SR:** So you must have had to do a lot of preparation before—like, you would cook everything beforehand and then just put it all together when you would get an order?

00:57:32

**LM:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I cut up all that green onion. I cut up *all* the green onion, and boiled the spaghetti. The same thing I did for this morning. Make a big gallon of sauce. I had about three or four bottles of that in the refrigerator already made up.

00:57:49

**SR:** And would you sell it year-round, even in the hot, hot months?

00:57:52

**LM:** Yes indeed. Oh yeah.

00:57:57

**SR:** And people would buy it even in the hot, hot months?

00:57:58

**LM:** Oh yeah. People crazy like me.

00:58:02

**SR:** Now what about, would this be a meal that you would make at home also?

00:58:06

**LM:** Oh yeah, every now and then I'd make it. I don't make it too often.

00:58:10

**FM:** We ate some last night matter of fact. We had some last night, my wife and I and my son.

We had to taste it to make sure that it would be all right when we brought it to you. [Laughs]

00:58:22

**SR:** How was it?

00:58:23

**FM:** Delicious as usual.

00:58:27

**SR:** Is it—when you would make it at home for your family, is it a special occasion dish? Or when would you make it? Just when you got a hankering?

00:58:35

**LM:** Whenever I felt like cooking it. Whenever I feel like making something I just go ahead and make it. When I feel like cooking something I just start cooking it. If I don't have all the stuff there I go put the rest of the stuff in and just cook it.

00:58:50

**SR:** Do you have any idea when people started—how this became a sort of typical New Orleans dish?

00:58:58

**LM:** Well a lot of people, they don't know nothing about it. Because I was like nine, ten years old when I found out about ya-ka-mein. But I'm going to tell you: black folks know a lot about ya-ka-mein. You know because that was cheap for us; that was cheap way back then. And it was a filling meal. So they know a lot about ya-ka-mein. You can go all over the world and find you some black folk and they going to tell you about a ya-ka-mein. Maybe y'all just learning about it. You know when I say "y'all," I mean you, the white—not black, okay.

00:59:34

But we been eating ya-ka-mein.

00:59:38

**SR:** So not just in New Orleans, but all over?

00:59:40

**LM:** Yeah, well, people that come from New Orleans know about ya-ka-mein. Like Frank's cousin and my people—the ones that come from New Orleans—know about ya-ka-mein. Now I don't know how it is over the world. Maybe we put a—maybe if we get out there and put a ya-ka-mein stand and start making small ones and start selling them it'll get all over the world. We will own the world up to it. [Laughs]

01:00:07

**FM:** Now see, it isn't much to it. For some people that may think it's a Chinese dish, it's not. I happen to—well, I went to Vietnam. So on my R&R I went to Hong Kong China and asked for ya-ka-mein. They didn't know what it was. So therefore it's not a Chinese dish.

01:00:37

**SR:** So had you heard that it was a Chinese dish, or you just thought because of its name?

01:00:40

**FM:** I thought because most of the people that sold it were Chinese. There was a guy in the Tremé who was—well it's closed down now. They sold it. It was like fifty cents then. It was cheap. And I just thought by him being Chinese and selling it, it was a Chinese dish. What I found out late was it's a Creole dish, not a Chinese dish. And they didn't have it in China, so therefore it's not a Chinese dish. [Laughs] That's right.

01:01:16

**SR:** You were craving it when you were over there.

01:01:17

**FM:** They didn't know what it was. You know whatever—

01:01:23

**SR:** Where was this man in the Tremé who was selling it?

01:01:29

**FM:** On Basin Street. Orleans Avenue, they call it now. But on Orleans between Marais and Villere. On Orleans Street. I can't remember his name, but it was a Chinese guy. We always called it the Chinamen's Place. We was too young to go in there because he was selling alcohol there, too. So we had to get somebody to get it for us. You know, an adult or eighteen years old, something like that.

01:02:05

**SR:** Was it made of beef?

01:02:08

**FM:** Pork mostly. Mostly pork or chicken. There was only one beef lady that I know and that's my wife. She's got that beef. Which is better I think, the beef.

01:02:25

**LM:** But I like the pork too.

01:02:30

**FM:** Well she could make all kinds but I like the beef myself. I do.

01:02:33

**SR:** When you were growing up, would your mother make it?

01:02:37

**FM:** Mama made plenty of stuff, but she made ya-ka-mein too because she was another good cook. That's why I guess me and Lucinda been together so long. [Laughs]

01:02:48

**LM:** Don't go there; don't go there. Don't go there because I used to call your mama and ask her how to cook certain things.

01:02:53

**FM:** Yeah, that's what I'm saying. She was--

01:02:54

**LM:** Because Girl, if you ate some of her food, Sara, she got you.

01:03:00

**FM:** And her mom, too, Miss—

01:03:01

**LM:** Oh yeah, my mama could cook. But they—

01:03:03

**FM:** Yeah, so she went from two real good cooks.

01:03:06

**LM:** Oh yeah.

01:03:07

**FM:** They were real good cooks. Her auntie used to go out in the lake—what's that, Lake Vista area or Lakeview area—and was working for this lady.

01:03:22

**LM:** Who?

01:03:22

**FM:** Yeah, cooking for this lady and stuff like that.

01:03:23

**LM:** Yeah, she—

01:03:23

**FM:** Yeah, she was a great cook. I mean a *good* one. So I guess along with my mother and her mother she learned a lot.

01:03:36

**LM:** My mama, she didn't allow you to get in the kitchen to cook her food. You weren't allowed in the kitchen like that so I learned from watching her. She had definitely had us washing some dishes and cleaning them pots. [Laughs]

01:03:52

**SR:** Wait, you cleaned her pots?

01:03:54

**LM:** Yeah, I had to clean my mama's pots and clean that kitchen, because I mean you had to clean her kitchen. You better not leave her kitchen dirty. I guess that's where I get it from. That kitchen, I had to get in there and clean that kitchen. All her pots I had to clean. But I used to watch her cook. That's how I learned to cook.

01:04:12



**FM:** And what fascinated me about both of our mothers, they can cook a full-course meal in a short span of time.

01:04:23

**SR:** How did they do that?

01:04:24

**FM:** In a short—I have no idea, but they could do it especially with the stew. You would figure stew would take a while to do. Uh-uh, thirty minutes they'd have—

01:04:38

**LM:** And they'd start from scratch.

01:04:41

**FM:** Just something that they knew how to do.

01:04:44

**SR:** Did they have a pressure cooker?

01:04:46

**FM:** No, it's just a gas stove and they'd set that heat at a certain height or whatever. They knew.

They just—through experience they just knew.

01:04:59

**LM:** See that pot? That pot you got on that stove?

01:04:59

**SR:** Uh-hm.

01:05:00

**LM:** That's a good stew pot. It don't take nothing to cook in that pot because it's sealed tight. So when you cook a stew half an hour, forty-fiveminutes, it should be ready from this pot. But it maybe will take longer for you, but I mean it wouldn't take me no more than about half an hour or hour at the most to cook a pot of stew in that pot. You said, huh? [Laughs]

01:05:25

**SR:** Takes me a little longer than that.

01:05:26

**FM:** I think it's just—I think it's just the height of the flame that they used or whatever. They know—

01:05:34

**LM:** You got to have the right—you got to have the right—

01:05:36

**FM:** —how high that fire is supposed to be for them to cook something real quick.

01:05:40

**LM:** Girlfriend, you got to have the right pot to cook stew in. See that pot right there? That's a good stew pot.

01:05:43

**SR:** Yeah, that's a Le Creuset pot.

01:05:44

**LM:** Huh?

01:05:46

**SR:** It's called a Le Creuset.

01:05:47

**LM:** Okay, it means it's not going to take long to cook. You'll be surprised. Leave that top on there. Don't let the steam out you know. Leave the top on there and cut it down to the same temperature; a half an hour, forty-five minutes your food will be ready. It should be, Sara. I mean—

01:06:03

**SR:** Okay, I'll work on it.

01:06:07

**LM:** Okay. [Hearty Laugh]

01:06:09

**SR:** When your mother would make ya-ka-mein—ya-ka-meat—

01:06:14

**LM:** Ya-ka-mein.

01:06:15

**SR:** Okay, how do you pronounce it?

01:06:18

**LM:** Ya-ka-mein.

01:06:18

**SR:** Ya-ka-mein?

01:06:20

**LM:** Ya-ka-mein.

01:06:18

**SR:** Ya-ka-mein?

01:06:19

**LM:** Yeah, Ya-ka-mein. Now everybody don't say that, Sara. You want to say it right: ya-ka-mein. Yeah, but you can say it like the old [inaudible] down in New Orleans, ya-ka-meat. You can say it like everybody else say it, ya-ka-meat.

01:06:32

**SR:** Right, that's how I thought you were saying it.

01:06:33

**LM:** No. See, that's why I said ya-ka-mein, but the real—it's ya-ka-mein.

01:06:39

**SR:** How do you spell it?

01:06:42

**LM:** Spell it, Frank. Y-a-c-a—

01:06:44

**FM:** No. Y-a-dash-k-a-dash-m-e-i-n.

01:06:53

**SR:** That's how I spell it because that's how I saw you spelling it. [Laughs]

01:06:56

**FM:** That's the spelling. That's the spelling.

01:06:59

**SR:** How did you figure that out, because it's spelled a million different ways?

01:07:03

**FM:** Well it's on the restaurant. Whenever you go to the restaurants, that's the way they spell it, ya-ka-mein. And all of these little Vietnamese places that make it and all that like if it was their dish—I say again, it's not an oriental dish.

01:07:20

**LM:** Yeah, but they don't make it right, Frank. They take and get that—what you call them noodles that be in the pack that we like to eat?

01:07:27

**FM:** Yeah, ramen.

01:07:27

**LM:** Ramen. They take the ramen noodle and—I'm going to tell you how they make it—the ramen noodles, and they get the chicken base—

01:07:39

**FM:** That comes with the noodles.

01:07:41

**LM:** No, they got a chicken base that they put in there. They put it in there along with their noodles and chop a piece of chicken in it—and charge you two dollars—and two or three onions.

01:07:53

**SR:** You've had that here?

01:07:54

**LM:** Yeah, Girl. You know I bought some of that and—yeah, I bought some of that. I paid my two dollars. It was two dollars. [Hearty Laugh]

01:08:05

**SR:** How much did you charge for yours?

01:08:07

**LM:** Oh, my ya-ka-mein depends on—I got the real thing. My ya-ka-mein—what it was, Frank?

01:08:12

**FM:** We had a big thirty-two-ounce, we charged four bucks. But it was thirty-two ounces.

01:08:18

**LM:** That was way back then, Frank.

01:08:19

**FM:** Whatever—

01:08:21

**LM:** No, that wasn't—

01:08:21

**FM:** —you sold it, Honey, four dollars. That's when we were selling it out of the truck for four dollars.

01:08:27

**LM:** It was?

01:08:27

**FM:** Right, but it was a thirty-two-ounce cup. So if you'd like a sixteen, it would be like two dollars.

01:08:34



**LM:** Yeah, but I—well, I had the wrong price, Frank, because there ain't no way in the world I could sell ya-ka-mein for four dollars.

01:08:40

**FM:** We was selling it for four dollars, Honey.

01:08:40

**LM:** I sold four dollars for the sixteen-ounce cups.

01:08:42

**FM:** Thirty-two. For the thirty-two ounce cup was four dollars.

01:08:44

**LM:** That's what you say, okay.

01:08:47

**FM:** That's what we sold them for.

01:08:48

**SR:** That's very inexpensive.

01:08:50

**LM:** Yes, that's too inexpensive. That's too inexpensive.

01:08:54

**FM:** But that's what you sold them for, Honey. At that time—

01:08:56

**LM:** That's what you charged the people for it?

01:08:58

**FM:** Huh?

01:08:58

**LM:** Then you owe me some money.

01:08:59

**FM:** That's what you had posted on the menu.

01:09:02

**LM:** You owe me some money because—

01:09:03

**FM:** I can get a menu and show it to you.

01:09:05

**LM:** Yeah, well you owe me some money.

01:09:05

**FM:** No, I don't.

01:09:06

**SR:** He owes you money? [Laughs]

01:09:08

**LM:** Yes, he does. [Hearty Laugh]

01:09:11

**FM:** Didn't we charge you four bucks for that ya-ka-mein?

01:09:14

**SR:** Oh, I'm not remembering it right now. I'm sure I have it written down.

01:09:17

**FM:** It was four bucks. That was—

01:09:19

**SR:** Well that's very inexpensive. Well, it isn't an expensive dish to buy in general. And maybe that's also why it's so popular. When your mother would make it, was that a happy night in your household?

01:09:37

**FM:** Oh, we always loved it, yeah. And all she had to do was tell my aunts and my cousins that she was making ya-ka-mein and we had visitors that night.

01:09:46

**SR:** So it's kind of like gumbo or another big New Orleans dish?

01:09:51

**LM:** Yeah.

01:09:51

**FM:** It's one of the originals, yes. It is one of the original dishes of New Orleans. A lot of people until today don't know about it, but as long as I can remember we had ya-ka-mein in New Orleans.

01:10:03

**LM:** Frank, black people know about ya-ka-mein now. We know about ya-ka-mein.

01:10:06

**FM:** Yeah, well I just—

01:10:07

**LM:** Because it was cheap and that was the kind of money we had in our pocket. We didn't have no money, so ya-ka-mein was a cheap dish and a good dish. So that's what we bought.

01:10:18

**SR:** Did you have customers at the truck who had never tried it before who decided to give it a whirl?

01:10:22

**LM:** Not too often because the customers that came and bought the ya-ka-mein from me, they were black folk, black people.

01:10:32

**FM:** Well now wait a minute though—

01:10:34

**LM:** Besides you, Sara. Okay, but—

01:10:37

**FM:** Now there was another lady. Remember when we used to be out there for the Saints game? This white couple would come after the game would be over with. They'd pass and get them a ya-ka-mein. And I can remember those things like that, see—

01:10:52

**LM:** You know why he can remember that? He was at the window and I was doing the cooking and putting stuff together. That's all—that's how he can remember a lot of stuff.

01:10:59

**FM:** There was a couple; every home Saints game, after the game they would get them one to go home with. Every game.

01:11:11

**LM:** I know about them shrimps. They'd get them shrimps after—.

01:11:12

**FM:** Oh, the guy from Mississippi. [Laughs] He had to have him a shrimp on a bun every time. He'd get him one to go into the game and he'd get him one going back home.

01:11:24

**SR:** So, I should say for the record that Charity Hospital, which was your home base, is very close to the Superdome.

01:11:31

**FM:** Right.

01:11:32

**LM:** Right.

01:11:32

**SR:** Yeah, so you would be out there for the games?

01:11:33

**FM:** Right.

01:11:35

**LM:** Yes, there would be some money.

01:11:36

**SR:** You had to make some money?

01:11:37

**LM:** Yeah, yeah I got to make some good—I had children to feed. And I'm saying they was greedy, Sara. And them girls was very expensive.

01:11:47

**SR:** Boys aren't expensive, huh?

01:11:48

**LM:** Not like that.

01:11:49

**SR:** No?

01:11:50

**LM:** Not like that.

01:11:50

**FM:** Well we had an oldest son and a youngest son, so we had the pass-me-downs. We had pass-me-downs.

01:11:56

**LM:** Yeah, but they weren't expensive like them girls. Girlfriend, them girls gave us hell—gave me hell anyway, because they would come straight to me. “Mama, I need this and I need that,” and I didn't want my girls out there trying to get them dollars, so I had to give them them dollars. You know what I'm saying? Whatever they needed, I tried to give it to them. If they didn't get I, they knowed they didn't get it from him because [Hearty Laugh] all they got to do is come to him and he'd tell me, “I ain't doing nothing, Lu. Them children want too much.” Ah, soon as they



said, “Dad, I need so and so and so and so,”— “Lucinda? You got a dollar you can give them children?” [Hearty Laugh]

01:12:35

**SR:** You were the one?

01:12:35

**LM:** Yeah.

01:12:37

**SR:** You were the bank?

01:12:37

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

01:12:38

**FM:** Oh yeah, she was—look, whatever I made went in my household.

01:12:43

**LM:** Yes.

01:12:45

**FM:** And that was it. I wouldn't worry about it, you know. Because you can see where the money was going so why would I worry about it?

01:12:54

**LM:** Go ahead and give it to the girls. Them girls got everything from him. Until today them girls would come; they'd tell me about something and I'd say, "Why don't you talk to your daddy," because I don't feel like hearing them holler. You going to holler to me, but they ain't going to holler to him. So I said, "Ask your daddy." "Mama—" I said, "Ask your daddy." That's it.

01:13:11

**FM:** They kind of have me wrapped around their fingers.

01:13:13

**LM:** Yeah, they got him.

01:13:13

**SR:** That's how it goes with the girls.

01:13:14

**FM:** Yeah. Them girls, I'm telling you.

01:13:16

**LM:** Yeah, they got him.

01:13:17

**FM:** Until today.

01:13:20

**SR:** I'm just thinking about how the first time I visited your truck you were in the front of Charity. But then at a certain point you were in the back of Charity, by the emergency room, no?

01:13:30

**LM:** I always had that stand back there.

01:13:32

**SR:** Oh, you did?

01:13:33

**LM:** Uh-hm.

01:13:33

**SR:** So did you have two stands?

01:13:35

**LM:** Yes. Remember me telling you about vendor zoning number one and vendor zoning number three? I had both stands.

01:13:42

**SR:** I see.

01:13:44

**LM:** But I'm going back and see about them stands because they had a guy on the sixth floor—I forgot this name.

01:13:51

**FM:** Well we went back to—because after a couple of years we got bored. So I said, “Let’s just put us some fruits and vegetables on the truck and we don’t have to worry about the food.” You know it’s kind of hard. It’s hard work. Restaurant work is hard work. And we’ll just do our little fruits and vegetables and something like, you know, make a little in-between money with my little checks and everything else like that. And we went back and the guy told us he had closed us down because he didn't see us out there, and once we close them down we don’t reopen them again. We didn't see you out there. And you can go see the City Attorney. Well we didn't feel—you know all the trauma that we had went through with this storm and everything else, families all split up, we didn't even bother to pursue it.

01:14:49

**SR:** So this was kind of recently? This was after Hurricane Katrina?

01:14:52

**FM:** Well it was right about '07—'06, '07, something like that.

01:14:58

**LM:** I had a license for '06.

01:14:59

**FM:** Yeah, well, '07, '07.

01:15:02

**SR:** Well, why don't you tell me about Katrina and how that affected you? Because I'll say that that whole area, the hospital area, flooded and—

01:15:11

**LM:** It was under water.

01:15:13

**SR:** —and Charity didn't reopen. And so what did you come back to? What did you do?

01:15:18

**LM:** Came back home on Wisteria Street. Our truck was is under water. You know the bottom part was in the water. Yeah, it got blowed out. So I came back. I didn't get—FEMA gave us—

01:15:39

**FM:** The regular money.

01:15:40

**LM:** —the regular money like it did everybody else. But they didn't pay my rent. They didn't pay my light and gas bill and they didn't give me no food stamps. So I had no other choice but to try to get that truck back out here to go back to work. We had a hard time because we had to buy stuff to get this generator back together. We lost the generator. So we had to wind up getting our other generator to hook onto the back of our truck and run that like that.

01:16:10

But I was trying to get back to work. I did go back to—ain't no *trying*; I went back to work. And it just hasn't been easy. Sara, I'm not used to not having. And I'm used to working. That's another thing. Sitting here talking to you, I'd really rather be working. Ain't nothing but two or three days out of the week. I don't have to work no six, seven days. All my children are gone, but just to have a little in-between change. That's what that's—that's what that's about. And then it gives me something to do.

01:16:42

**SR:** Well you got back up and running and I found you by University Hospital, right?

01:16:48

**LM:** Yeah. Yeah, that's where I went, down there, because that's where the people asked us to come at. They didn't have much over there where I was at on by Charity. It was almost dead. So we went down there by University where they called us at, so we went down there and stayed there a good little while. We were having a hard time with that truck. The truck still wasn't running right. And we didn't have the money to continue to fix it. You know keep working on it. We didn't have the money to do that. So we sold it. And got that restaurant open and it was a drug area and we didn't know that. And I let that—we let that go. And I been at home ever since, going crazy.

01:17:39

**FM:** We did do a little stint in the French Market down there. We had a little fruit stand out there in the French Market for a minute, and we added some lemonade on it, and I mean the lemonade just went to the moon. And I don't know how it happened, maybe I'm wrong, but I'm assuming that the rest of the vendors got kind of annoyed with the fact that we was doing so well with it—

01:18:07

**LM:** No, Frank.

01:18:10

**FM:** —and then they came and asked us to stop.

01:18:10

**SR:** With the lemonade?

01:18:13

**LM:** No, no, Frank.

01:18:12

**FM:** Well okay. What's your version on it?

01:18:15

**LM:** My version on it is that certain people could sell certain things, okay, and the fruit stand that was on the corner, I taught them how to do some things to make some money because I had the lemonade stand. I taught them how to make lemonade and the girl went and bought—she went and bought all the stuff for to do the lemonade, and the fresh fruit that she was buying was going bad—

01:18:38

**FM:** And candy apples.

01:18:38

**LM:** Yeah, different things, I'd teach her how, you know, to make money. Because I have a lot of business sense. That's my problem, so—. [Laughs]

01:18:46



**SR:** That's a problem?

01:18:46

**LM:** Yeah, that's a problem because I'm business-minded. I'm not normal, you know. Talk to me for a little while, you're going to find out I'm going to talk some business to you. Like I tell you about that ya-ka-mein stand, right? [Hearty Laugh] So you know I'm serious. But anyway, we was out there selling a little fruit and vegetables, and then I have a pot this big, [Gestures] and I painted on that pot. I'm thinking about money all the time, right, so I paint on that pot about the lemonade. It had a little faucet on it. So we cleaned that up and bought the cups and the water and stuff, and I brought that out there and went to selling lemonade. We was doing good.

01:19:28

But the point was, I don't think it was the people around us because—. The French Market done messed up so bad they'd do all kind of things. What they did was they had rules and things for everybody out there, what they could sell, what they could not sell, but they want their money from you. But they going to tell you what you could sell and you could not sell. But see, I wasn't raised in a market like that. The market I was raised in, everybody came and they could sell anything they wanted to sell.

01:19:54

**FM:** Anything they wanted to sell in the old French Market.

01:19:59

**LM:** In the old French Market. And everybody made money, right? Now this one could sell that. They done wrote—they sitting there always writing—and write up these orders and things, you know what I mean? They're not out there working, so they don't know what's going on. They don't know what people need to do to survive.

01:20:18

So they write up all these rules and regulations for people and they came out there. I was doing good with the lemonade. And what's that guy's name was?

01:20:29

**FM:** Oh, I don't—Ferdinand.

01:20:33

**LM:** Ferdinand didn't want us out there. I ain't going to say nothing else about Ferdinand because I can say a lot. But they had us stop selling lemonade. Now how the City going to make money? You tell me, Sara. The City is crying about money. They don't need no money. They don't need no money. That was like a—with the lemonade that I was selling, if I could have stayed selling that I could have paid a lot of taxes, a lot of taxes. You know, but I didn't sell it long enough to pay them. You already are charging me twenty-five dollars a day. You already are charging me eight dollars to go park before I make one dollar. You know what I'm saying?

01:21:29

**SR:** It's excessive.

01:21:32

**LM:** Yes, it's very excessive. So that's why the people are having a hard time out there now.

01:21:36

**FM:** And I think that—what I was trying to do, or we was trying to do, is have an enclosed area where we wouldn't have to—every morning when you come there you have to unload your truck, set up your tables; every evening break down your truck, set up, put it back—a daily routine. And this lemonade thing that we had, she said—it holds twenty-two gallons of lemonade. And you got to prepare it at home. You can't prepare it out there. So that has to come off of the truck. Fortunately I had a little table I can kind of you know roll it on the table and—.

01:22:24

**LM:** We used to have to drag it out there remember?

01:22:27

**FM:** That's when we started getting most of the flack I believe, too.

01:22:30

**SR:** When you started preparing it out there?

01:22:31

**FM:** Right. It just was too hard on us to, you know, pick all that—

01:22:36

**SR:** To transport?

01:22:37

**FM:** —yeah and all that stuff. And then another thing, you know the people really don't start stirring in the French Market until about ten o'clock in the daytime. Six-thirty you got to start breaking down and be out of there for seven o'clock. *We* used to stay until eight and nine o'clock at night.

01:22:56

**LM:** And then—

01:22:56

**FM:** You know, and then some.

01:22:58

**LM:** And then some. Because in the French Quarter not a lot of people are out there at nighttime. But if the Quarter is open people come when they find that the French Quarter—the market part is open. But you're not allowed to sell anything so what's the sense to be there? That's how they're catching hell out there.

01:23:19

**SR:** When did you do that? So was this—you sold your truck, I understand—

01:23:22

**FM:** Right after we sold the truck. What it was? Around '08, Lu, something like that—'08 when we moved over there on Hudson on the West Bank? Around '08 I imagine, yeah.

01:23:35

**SR:** And then you opened the restaurant in the east?

01:23:38

**FM:** Well we had that going at the same time but it was—it kind of folded away.

01:23:46

**SR:** So now the goal is the ya-ka-mein stand?

**01:23:52**

**FM:** [Laughs]

01:23:53

**LM:** [Laughs] I'm telling you, Sara, I maybe—maybe I can get some investors.

01:24:03

**FM:** If we can—

01:24:05

**LM:** In a good area to put up just ya-ka-mein, nothing but ya-ka-mein—beef, pork, and chicken.

01:24:12

**FM:** Chicken.

01:24:12

**LM:** Ya-ka-mein, and sell that. I was thinking about that kind of hard. But I know if I don't do that I'm going to get my vendor zone back because I was grandfather cloused in.

01:24:27

**FM:** They had no business shutting it down.

01:24:28

**LM:** They had no business shutting that vendor zone down.

01:24:30

**FM:** Like I said, with all the steam—it couldn't be me. I'm less—not totally less—but my wife will fight until the very end.

01:24:43

**LM:** I'm a—

01:24:43

**FM:** And I was waiting on her. And when I seen she wasn't too enthusiastic about it, I said, "Well, maybe she's tired with the foolishness."

01:24:53

**LM:** But you know you been fighting all these years, I don't know why I got to go back there to fight. The NAACP, one of the members in the NAACP wants me to file a lawsuit and sue the City. I don't want to do that.

01:25:08

**SR:** One of the members of what?

01:25:10

**LM:** The NAACP.

01:25:11

**FM:** The NAACP.

01:25:12

**LM:** Yeah. I don't want to sue nobody. Just give me my vendor zones back and I'm gone, because I'm not about—I can make my own money. I ain't got to go hustle the City for no money. You know, I can make my own money.

01:25:26

**SR:** So you would like to go back to the Charity area where you had—?

01:25:29

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

01:25:32

**FM:** About three days a week or so like that, and maybe a weekend, you know.

01:25:33

**LM:** I just want it because it's mine's. I was grandfather cloused in for that and I want it. So I'm going to have to go back there and get ignorant. I don't want to sue them, but if I have to sue them I will sue them, Sara, because I done been to them years ago, but I don't try to sue nobody. I never did try to sue nobody.

01:25:52

**FM:** We had some things done. We had our vendor zone moved without our permission.

01:25:59

**LM:** Yeah.

01:26:01



**FM:** They're supposed to at least notify you and say, "Look, the place where you are right now, we're having a lot of flack out of the cab drivers, so we're going to move you." We come back, the signs were moved way down; oh, they did some things to us, Sara, you know, but we just kept trusting in the Lord.

01:26:25

**LM:** But I can fight. [Laughs] I'm a fighter, Sara.

01:26:30

**SR:** She doesn't stop, huh?

01:26:32

**LM:** No.

01:26:34

**FM:** Well that's why I was surprised when they told us. I said, "Well, we're getting ready for another battle." But she didn't say anything more about it, and I said, "Well, I guess my wife is getting tired." So we just left it.

01:26:50

**SR:** Maybe you just needed to recharge.

01:26:51

**LM:** I am. I'm ready. [Laughs] I'm ready. I'm going down to that second floor because I saw a man one time down there on the first floor. And I went in the City Hall, but I didn't tell him nothing about it. I was up there talking to Wesley, and he told me that he was going to talk to the Mayor about it and set up a meeting for me and the Mayor. That never happened—about two years ago now—a year.

01:27:13

**FM:** Nagin was the mayor at that time.

01:27:16

**LM:** Nagin was the mayor.

01:27:17

**FM:** Yeah, Baby, Nagin was the mayor.

01:27:22

**LM:** Yeah, but I was talking to Wesley and Landrieu was the mayor.

01:27:27

**FM:** No, Baby.

01:27:28

**LM:** I did it, Frank, so I must be knowing.

01:27:28

**FM:** Nagin was the mayor, Hon.

01:27:31

**LM:** I told you I was going to wait until the mayor come and get in office, remember?

01:27:35

**FM:** All right, that's Landrieu that time, but we went there before—when you talked to Wesley when Nagin was the mayor.

01:27:40

**LM:** No, I talked to Wesley when Landrieu was the mayor.

01:27:44

**FM:** Okay.

01:27:46

**SR:** Who is Wesley?

01:27:47

**LM:** That's one of the workers there on the second floor, but he was the—see, what I was doing was waiting on Nagin to leave. I was waiting on the new mayor to come in, and when he came

in—. Okay, when he came in I went there to talk to Wesley and he told me he was going to contact me, which he never did. I went there about a couple times after that and he never did. I said, well, I didn't want to go back there with a lawyer who loves to file a lawsuit and all that kind of—. That just doesn't make no sense.

01:28:20

**FM:** All we had to do was just sign a paper.

01:28:25

**SR:** Sign a paper?

01:28:27

**LM:** Yeah.

01:28:27

**FM:** And we pay you the money for the zone. If we're buying, or whatever taxes, we'll pay you that and go back to work. That's all—

01:28:38

**LM:** That's all. I don't see no sense in suing the City of New Orleans. The City of New Orleans for all purposes and all the things that can happen, I was thanking God—thankful to be there over fifty years. You know I had seven children to raise and I was thankful for me being there. After all the drama [[Emphasis Added]] they put me through, I still was thankful. So I don't want

to go out and sue nobody. I just want to put my stands back. Give me an okay; I'll move them where you want to move them at. Well, in the CBD [Central Business District], because I do have that right. Once you grandfather a business in, grandfather a business in, you can't just take something from them and do what you want to do with them. It will take an act of Congress to do that. So the act of Congress up in Washington—never happened. So give me my stand.

01:29:29

See, I can go back there and sue them for the days I didn't work and the years that you left me out of business. I can go back and do all them dirty things, but I don't want to do that. I just want you to give me what belongs to me and let me go to work and let me die with a peaceful mind that I was able to work. I'm not looking for no food stamps or the welfare; I'm looking for to work. What's wrong with working? Let me do what I want to do with it. That's my zones.

01:29:57

**SR:** And it doesn't look like there's anyone else there.

01:30:00

**LM:** No, they can't put nobody there.

01:30:02

**FM:** They can't. They can't.

01:30:05

**LM:** They got to be riding around in their trucks, Sara—them lunch trucks. When they get done—they want them to work fifteen minutes in one spot, and then they got to move. Fifteen minutes. How you going to do that? Get the people in a business zone some way where they can make two dollars and pay y'all more taxes, because that's what's running the world, the taxes of the small businesses.

01:30:29

**FM:** Businesses period, that's where they generate the taxes from no matter how big or small, you're still—every little bit helps.

01:30:38

**SR:** What was your biggest income? Where did you get most of your income from, the produce or the prepared food?

01:30:50

**LM:** I never separated them.

01:30:52

**FM:** Just a combination. It just was a combination.

01:30:54

**LM:** I never separated them. They was all together. Whenever—you go buy an apple and then you want a ya-ka-mein. I threw it together. It was never separated.

01:31:06

**SR:** How many orders of ya-ka-mein would you get a day?

01:31:11

**LM:** I don't know. I didn't keep all that there.

01:31:15

**FM:** At least ten.

01:31:16

**LM:** Sometimes.

01:31:16

**FM:** At least ten. Especially in the wintertime. We sold a lot.

01:31:22

**LM:** You know I never separated all that. I just took whatever my day's expenses is and whatever I buy for the next day, you know. Yeah, I never separated all that. You almost finished with me?

01:31:36

**SR:** Yeah, I can tell you're getting—you're fidgeting with your phone. You're ready to wrap it up.

01:31:41

**LM:** Yeah, I can come back another day.

01:31:42

**SR:** Well let me ask a wrap-up question, which is: You talked a lot about—I can tell that you both really liked working and you liked working down there, but what was your favorite part of your job?

01:31:58

**LM:** Meeting the people. Oh god. Meeting people, dealing with the public. I'm accustomed dealing to the public. I've been dealing with the public since I was five or six years old. So you know I—but I can't remember all their names and things because that's too many people. But I love dealing with the public.

01:32:20

**SR:** Well no wonder—

01:32:21

**LM:** Whether they spend one dollar or a quarter. I appreciate that.



01:32:28

**FM:** It was our social life. And what I miss—

01:32:30

**LM:** Is social life.

01:32:32

**FM:** —is because everybody in the city of New Orleans came to the Charity Hospital. So you got a chance to meet people that you had grown up with and it sort of kept you in touch with your peers. That's the biggest thing I miss, yeah, is the people. We met people from all over the United States right there by that truck—all over—and out of the United States.

01:33:02

**LM:** I done met politicians, governors, presidents. I done met some of everybody. I just enjoyed it. If they don't spend a quarter with me I still enjoyed talking. [Laughs]

01:33:21

**FM:** And right now we've been fishing; we've been giving fish away. That's how much fishing we've been doing.

01:33:27

**LM:** What kind of fish you eat, Sara?

01:33:28

**SR:** All kinds.

01:33:29

**LM:** Yeah, well you're on my list.

01:33:31

**FM:** Perch and bass and all. You eat that?

01:33:34

**SR:** Uh-hm.

01:33:34

**FM:** We caught a lot of—

01:33:36

**SR:** No carp.

01:33:37

**FM:** Oh no. We don't even fool with that.

01:33:38

**LM:** Who?

01:33:40

**FM:** Carp.

01:33:40

**LM:** Oh no.

01:33:41

**FM:** That's them big things that will be out there—yeah, all that. We don't want that.

01:33:47

**LM:** No, I don't do that.

01:33:48

**FM:** Oh boy. Oh, we give up so much. I mean redfish, catfish—

01:33:52

**LM:** Speckled trout.

01:33:54

**FM:** —speckled trout, sheep head, drum, bass—

01:33:59

**LM:** Perches.

01:34:00

**FM:** —eels, yeah.

01:34:01

**SR:** Where do you get the eels?

01:34:03

**FM:** Right down in the Lafourche Parish we catch them.

01:34:07

**LM:** Yeah, and Golden Meadow.

01:34:10

**SR:** Oh, you go down to Golden Meadow? That's a drive.

01:34:11

**LM:** Yeah, yeah, girlfriend. We go ahead down there fishing.

01:34:13

**FM:** We go. We travel. We go all the way down to Elmer's Island.

01:34:17

**SR:** Do you sleep down there or do you drive home?

01:34:19

**FM:** Just drive. Get up and drive. Like I said, we're not doing anything. We could be working, you know, at least three days and the rest of the time we could fish.

01:34:31

**LM:** Yeah, I love it.

01:34:35

**SR:** Well I'm thrilled that y'all are here and that we got to talk and meet up again.

01:34:40

**LM:** We going to meet again.

01:34:41

**SR:** Yeah, we're going to meet again and—

01:34:44

**FM:** I got a gift for her. I'm thinking about this gift. Remember that door knob that my Uncle Melvin gave to me?

01:34:57

**LM:** You would love it.

01:34:57

**FM:** It's brass, beautiful.

01:34:59

**SR:** Well I don't need any gifts from you, but sitting down talking is wonderful.

01:35:04

**FM:** Yeah, but you can't tell us what to give you and what not to give you.

01:35:07

**SR:** I can try. [Laughs]

01:35:10

**FM:** Well we're not using it, and I noticed that the one you have is kind of—

01:35:16

**SR:** Oh yeah.

01:35:16

**FM:** —you know.

01:35:17

**LM:** Yeah, but we got one—

01:35:18

**SR:** Don't look too closely around here. You might think of a lot of gifts.

01:35:22

**FM:** Yeah, well—

01:35:23

**LM:** You going to love these.

01:35:24

**SR:** Okay, well thank you.

01:35:25

**LM:** This is outstanding—

01:35:28

**FM:** It's some solid brass, beautiful.

01:35:31

**LM:** It is outstanding.

01:35:31

**FM:** So the next time we come I'm going to bring it to you.

01:35:33

**SR:** All right.

01:35:35

**LM:** Yeah, we're going to dig it up and bring it.

01:35:36

**SR:** Well let's take some photos and see some ya-ka-mein.

01:35:40

**LM:** Yeah, Girlfriend, yeah.

01:35:43

**SR:** Thank you.

01:35:45

[End Mitchells Interview]