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**FULL TRANSCRIPT:**

SUBJECT: Gilberto Eyzaguirre

- Former waiter @ Galatoire's  
209 Bourbon Street  
New Orleans, LA 70130
- Currently a waiter @ Tommy's Restaurant  
746 Tchoupitoulas Street  
New Orleans, LA 70130

DATE: April 1, 2005 @ 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Bar @ The New Orleans Athletic Club

INTERVIEWER: Amy Evans

LENGTH: Approx. 50 minutes

[For more information about Gilberto's time at Galatoire's visit this link:  
<http://www.welovegilberto.com/>]

NOTE: Various sounds occur throughout this interview. Rather than mention them individually and interrupt the flow of the conversation, they are noted here: a group of men can be heard talking in the adjoining room, the men can be heard moving chairs around occasionally, and a squeak can be heard from time to time as Gilberto moves about in his chair. When the occurring sounds are an obvious interruption to the interview, they are noted in the transcript.

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[Recording opens with sound of a group of men talking in the background]

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Friday, April first, two thousand and five at about two p.m. in the afternoon. And I am at the New Orleans Athletic Club on Rampart Street with Gilberto Eyzaguirre, um, who was a waiter at Galatoire's and is now at Tommy's Restaurant in the central business district on Tchoupitoulas Street. Is that right?

Gilberto Eyzaguirre: Right.

AE: All right. And, um, Gilberto, if you wouldn't mind stating your name and also your birthdate for the record.

GE: Okay, uh, I'm name is Gilberto Eyzaguirre. I was born in, uh, August twenty-ninth, nineteen forty-five.

AE: Okay.

GE: In Lim, Peru.

AE: And what brought you to New Orleans?

GE: Well, uh, actually I went to school in New Orleans in the [nineteen] seventies. And, um, I had a lot of family. And my cousin-in-law, you know, persuaded me come—to come to New Orleans. You know, we were going through a—Peru was going through a terrorist groups at that time, so most of the people—everybody was trying to get out. So I had the opportunity to get—to leave, and, uh, I came to New Orleans and, uh, after a week my cousin-in-law says, “Well, before you wait—wait for a job, you know, with the government, why don’t you work, you know, until you get a job? Okay. So f—I start—start working. I [had] never worked in a restaurant so, you know, in that type of service industry. And, uh, I liked it. So, uh, I keep staying there. I always was quitting, uh, or doing other things but, uh, you know. Like the customers, uh, I established a relationship with them and so it was kind of hard to detach from that, uh—

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: —you know, feeling.

AE: What year was this?

GE: That was in nineteen seventy-nine.

AE: Okay.

GE: October. So I stayed there until, uh, April, twenty-seventh, two thousand and two.

AE: So the first—the first restaurant job you had was at Galatoire’s?

GE: The only one.

AE: The only restaurant job you’ve had in New Orleans?

GE: The only one.

AE: Oh, my goodness. So what was that application process like? Did they have—

GE: Well, uh, Galatoire’s traditionally has been hiring waiters through the word of mouth.

AE: Okay.

GE: The waiters that work there bring other people. They have, uh, same family members working as waiters right now. Cajuns, you know. So they

don't advertise. They just bring people that are related or friends or [that] somebody recommended.

AE: But you had no—

GE: I didn't have any—

AE: —experience prior to this.

GE: —experience at all. I had never worked in a restaurant.

AE: So how did that work out for you? [Short laugh]

GE: Well, at the beginning it was a little nervous. Mostly because, uh—uh, I used to work for the Peruvian government. I used to represent Peru controlling grains in—in different ports. Like we buy grains from the U.S., the Gulf, Argentina, Canada. So it was different, so I had to overcome a few things. You know, the prejudice of serving tables, waiting on—[laughs], you know. But, uh, basically, I liked it and, uh, I developed like an osmosis with the customers. And, uh, that kept me going. And, you know, it last[ed] for a long time. [Short laugh]

AE: Yeah, well and at Galatoire's—it's such a high tradition there.

GE: Right.

AE: What was the learning curve for you to get used to that kind of service?

GE: Well [short pause] Galatoire's—I started waiting on a lady that was like eight-five when I started working, so I was telling her, "Yeah," you know, she'd start asking a question and said—she said, uh, "What, uh—yeah, you know"—and I tried to tell her that this is a restaurant. [She said], "No, this is not a restaurant. This is an institution in New Orleans." So I learned the concept right away. And the culture was different probably at Galatoire's than any other restaurant.

AE: Sure.

GE: You know, it's—it's a different deal. And, uh, which [short pause] a lot of things has to do with the ambiance, the food and the service. Which are the three fragile elements of success—a successful business. And well, the three look like they have, you know, they are placed right. [Laughs]

AE: Right.

GE: And that's what makes Galatoire's different from other restaurants, I think. You know.

AE: Well and the focus on this historical piece is on cocktail culture in New Orleans and bartenders, specifically. But Galatoire's is one of the unique places in that the wait staff serve—

GE: Right.

AE: —drinks for—

GE: Right.

AE: —most of its existence until about—was it fifteen years ago?

GE: [Nineteen] ninety-seven.

AE: Ten years ago? Not even.

GE: Yeah.

AE: Okay. So can you describe, um, a little bit of what that was like, serving cocktails for customers?

**[COUNTER: 05:01]**

GE: When I started working, uh, you learn—learn through trials too. So it was just a practical—kind of quick. Because you do so many drinks. I mean, we used to—we became famous for being the best drinks in New Orleans. As far as content, amount—and the quality of the drink, too. But [clears throat] and, uh, it took me a while to learn all the drinks because there are many drinks. The regular drinks, you can learn it, but there are some sophisticated drinks too. [Laughs] That it takes time for—you know, to right it—to balance the right elements, you know, the amounts and all that.

AE: And how did you learn to do that?

GE: And, uh, just practice. As in watching other people, the amounts and seeing what they do. It's just observation, you know. [Clears throat] But, uh, like one of the most famous drinks from Galatoire's is Sazeracs, you know.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: Have a little accent, you know, because—it's a must. You know, most people go there and no, they never have the drink. Have it. They even sell—sometimes they sell bottles. They make it, if the customer wants to buy? They make it. But, uh, it was exciting. Until nineteen—nineteen ninety-seven, that, uh, they have the new manager come in and do new ideas [short laugh] tried to change the place. So the computers and, uh, one of the key ingredients of the drinks—and that's why Galatoire's was different from any restaurant—was [clears throat] that we use to chop ice. For like two

hours. And the—the—the drink would remain undiluted for a while [because of the quality of the ice]. You wouldn't start losing the consistency, you know. And, uh, he changed it to the machine [that makes ice]. You know, everybody has it. Like, uh, if you don't drink quickly it melts quick and you will lose, you know, the taste of [the drink]. Uh, and then he [hired] bartenders too.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: So that was, uh, made the difference. After that, we never served drinks anymore. We served them, but we didn't make them.

AE: What did the rest of the wait staff think about that? Was it—

GE: Well [clears throat] actually, we were—people, uh, were disappointed, uh, some customers—well, they'd give me twenty dollars. I'd say, "What's that for?" They would say, "Give this to the bartender, and tell him [to] let you make the drink."

AE: [Short laugh]

GE: That's how important it was, the drink for them. [Laughs]

AE: Right. Yeah.

GE: The new bartenders—who knows. They weren't making the way they used to. So—

AE: Yeah. And it takes the—the personal interaction away—

GE: Exactly!

AE: —from the making of the drink.

GE: Exactly.

AE: So you're not making them for your customers, there's an anonymous person—

GE: Exactly, exactly. It's like serving food. You—some—you know what people like. How they like the drink? And that's, you know, and that's what makes the relationship more deep, you know. Stronger.

AE: Can you talk about, um, some of your regular customers? Not necessarily by name but, um, some requests for drinks that you served over the years or—

GE: Well [short pause] Well most of the drinks, uh, actually, we don't—we don't, uh, do—we do the most common drinks. Anyway, the popular drinks. We—drinks that aren't, you know, too sophisticated. Too complex. You see? Actually, sometimes they don't even have some—some [of the] ingredients. You know? Like Hurricanes, things like that. The Mint Juleps. Things like that. But most of the drinks, you know, they were what people want, you know. They were there. So it's—It's not really a menu or anything like that.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: Just, uh, you make it like—

AE: People come to New Orleans and they want—

GE: Regular drinks, right. And they realized that I work in different restaurant. They serve the best drinks in New Orleans. For the portion too. You know. So that's one of the reasons people go to [Galatoire's] It's not only the food, it's the drinks. That we had the edge over the other places. We used to have.

AE: Yeah.

GE: Until it was, eh—but, uh, it was, uh, very, uh, engaging experience. The waiters used to chop their ice and make their own drinks.

AE: And would you say that, um, given the regular clientele that goes through there and people asking for specific waiters when they dine at Galatoire's, do you think as much as that was—I mean it all falls under the umbrella of service, but do you think a certain way a certain waiter made a cocktail had a lot to do with that allegiance?

**[COUNTER: 10:00]**

GE: Uh, [short pause] it could be—it was an important factor. I mean, usually most, uh, I think the—the early ones was in the personal charm of each person. The waiter, you know, to the customers and [short pause]—and entertaining the customers, I think, is probably good business too. You go to a restaurant, you know, you get waited on, you drink, you [get] food but, uh, how do you feel good in the experience? That's what makes a difference, I think. Um-hmm. And that's why Galatoire's is probably—I have one article that, uh, I think it was con—they made a survey about the best waiters in New Orleans? [Sound of chair being dragged across the floor] Galatoire's was always winning the—

AE: Yeah?

GE: Number one. Yeah. [Short pause] So, that's, uh, [short pause] probably what makes a—a big difference in certain places.

AE: And then the first bartender—full-time bartender that [Galatoire's] hired, was that someone that had worked in lots of other New Orleans restaurants, or were they coming in kind of green?

GE: Well, they, uh—actually [short pause] they had a—they had a bunch. It turned hands. They didn't last too long.

AE: Yeah.

GE: The first ones that I remember, uh, especially with the, uh—see we used to prepare our drinks. We w—we would do it fast because that's a fast business there. And these bartenders are now used to that, you know? You've got three, four waiters waiting for a drink. "I need my drink!" you know. [Laughs] So—so it was a kind of uncomfortable with the—because of the idea of the bartender is to serve quick to the customers like they're used to. And not waiting. I mean, we weren't used to that, you know? So that created a lot of conflict with many bartenders. They quit. They didn't stay too long because they were—they felt they were harassed or you know [laughs] so many characters and waiters that have been [there] thirty or forty years. It's just they—they have seniority in other words, you know.

AE: Sure.

GE: With—with [the] management.

AE: They'd go back and make their own cocktails—

GE: Right.

AE: —anyway.

GE: Right. Exactly. And so but, uh, they changed so many people as bartenders, it's unreal. I think right now they don't have anybody that I knew two years ago. Of course, that's a difference, you know.

AE: Yeah. Well and can you talk a little bit about when, um, before the full-time bartender, when the wait staff was creating their own drinks? Was there ever like a bottleneck in the bar where you couldn't—there were too many waiters in there?

GE: Well, we used to—they used to have a front bar. The front desk was the bar.

AE: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

GE: So actually, you have all the bottles, and you just have to—to do it right there.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: And actually, it was in the dining room, because it's just at the front. You ever been in Galatoire's?

AE: I've been in, yes, but I've not eaten there, unfortunately.

GE: The front, that was the bar. You were waiting seating and—we were mixing the drinks there. Which is the, you know [laughs] but they didn't have really a bar. This little thing was—and, uh, we just, uh, came with the ice or with the mixing—you know, shake it right there. So it's, uh, it was a little difficult because of the space and all that. We didn't have the facilities. And, uh, we'd, uh—

AE: Part of the performance of service, I would imagine.

GE: Huh?

AE: Part of the performance of service at Galatoire's.

GE: Right. Exactly. It's, uh—makes a difference.

[Short pause]

AE: What about things like Café Brulot? Can you talk about how that's served and—

GE: Yeah, that's the most popular after-dinner drink—particular after-dinner drink. Uh, you kind of preheat it, you now, and you just, uh, do the flaming [cognac] at—at the table. And, I went [laugh] well, they used to—we created a system—well, not a system, a tradition of put—we put the flame on the—over the tablecloth. And, uh, they didn't mind. The customer wanted, you know, to see some performance, you know, it's just a little fame and dis—extinguish it. And I did, uh, I reached the point [where] I could use names—write names. You know, like you are Amy, I put "Amy" in flames, you know, in the tablecloth. But, uh, sometimes it was a little dangerous in the way—not burning anybody but, uh, [clears throat] like one of the waiters, uh, had ten people [and] they were drunk. [They] said, "Throw it in the—the flame on the table!" So they were too—too compact, everybody, so he kind of missed the line—the table, and he hit it here and there [motions to the arm and forearm]. The guy [said,] "Oh!" He didn't get burned, but it was hot—you know, it becomes real hot.

**[COUNTER: 15:08]**

AE: Yeah.

GE: But, uh, that's one of probably the only—probably the only place that really is famous for [Café] Brulot. You have to—it's a must with the local people.

AE: Yeah.

GE: Plus it's—it's something different. It's, uh—

AE: Did you enjoy preparing those for people?

GE: Yeah. But what's, uh, it was fun. People liked it, you know. It's a different experience.

AE: Mm-hmm.

GE: Actually, I was in a food show, you know, doing a [Café] Brulot. At one time they were filming there.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: But, uh, people love that. And the—it's different.

AE: It's dramatic. [Short laugh]

GE: Right, right. It's different. It's different.

AE: Does Galatoire's make a lot of other traditional New Orleans cocktails?

GE: Well, besides—I would say the Sazeracs is—the—the—you know, they used to call it, uh, the Galatoire's Special.

AE: That was the Sazerac?

GE: The—some people didn't know, you know, and [they'd say,] "No, we want the Galatoire's Special." But, uh, after that [one]? No, all the drinks were [short pause] consistent. And most people now drink, uh, vodka, you know?

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: It's—I mean, it's become so popular, different type[s] of vodka. Gin's gone lower and lower and, uh, bourbon—not so much. It's a—I would say, ninety percent of vodka right now, you know, drinks.

AE: Did Galatoire's serve many—while you were there—Ramos Gin Fizzes?

GE: No. They don't, uh—they don't make them. They missing one of the ingredients.

AE: Yeah?

GE: So we never could make that.

AE: I—I just wondered because that—

GE: I—I don't know if they do it now, with the new bartender but, uh—

AE: Yeah.

GE: I remember [that] they didn't have some of the ingredients.

AE: That's—that's something that sounds like a time consuming drink, and so I wondered from a—

GE: Right.

AE: —waiter's perspective if that was ever something that proved too difficult to manage or—

GE: Exactly. I think, uh [short pause]

AE: Well, what was it like working on Bourbon Street there, in the midst of all the tourists drinking down there.

GE: Well, it's a—it's a—it's an exciting experience, I think, to be there. Bourbon [Street]. Of course, I think it's wearing out now. You know? [Short laugh] Most of the restaurants are now over in the Warehouse District, which is right on the other side of Canal [Street]. [Clears throat] Easy to park, nice facilities, you know. Bourbon Street is getting full of ditches places, cheap prostitutes, you know. So it's a different from what—when I started, you know. Um, I've seen the evolution of the—of the street. But it's fun. I think, uh, Galatoire's is—is known by, uh, most of the movie actors, musicians. They like to be there. So you see—and then you have all these mirrors around, you see. And the thing in New Orleans about the mirrors is that you can see in the mirrors even if you are—from one corner [of the restaurant] to the other. Actually, through the mirror you can see anybody. Which is unusual, you know, in a place. And people go not so much for the food but to be seen—who's there, you know. [Short pause] But, uh, it's fun. [Clears throat] Actually, one psychologist told me, uh, "I couldn't go upstairs." [I said,] "Why" [He said,] "I've seen it. I've been going to Galatoire's since I was young. Upstairs is flat. There's no culture. No tradition, nothing. It's just dining. I could go anywhere, you know. Downstairs is the—is the—that's the place." Even when they tried to open new places in Baton Rouge? F—you know, people from Baton Rouge would come tell the manager, "We want—here's the culture. This is the tradition. We wouldn't go there [to the

restaurant in Baton Rouge].” [Loud clap in background] So it’s—it’s not just the food, you understand. It’s the place.

AE: Did you have any idea about all of that when you first applied [to work] there?

GE: No. No idea. And that’s one of the reasons, probably, [that] I stayed so long there. You know. I liked it. I don’t know. It was, uh, exciting. It was like a party. You [are] serving people, and you’re having a good time. You laugh and you drink, you know. It just, uh—it doesn’t exist, the formality—distance with the customers, you know. It’s just a close relationship.

AE: Um-hmm. Did you have customers that would buy you drinks while you were working as a server?

**[COUNTER: 20:08]**

GE: Yeah. Drinks, yeah, all the time. But, uh, we [were] not supposed to drink, so—you have to be of the mindset—when you have twenty-five people [short laugh] you’d better be—you know, different tables [short laugh] you have to know which—

AE: Right.

GE: And the only thing—the only help you have is a busy boy. You know, you do everything there: carry plates, drinks, everything. It’s not like other places [where] you have a runner so—takes the food to go, okay, and certain things. And you know, it’s easier but over there [at Galatoire’s] you have to do everything, you know? You serve the desserts—flaming desserts sometimes, you know. But, uh, it’s a—it’s different. Different to be there.

AE: What about when service ends at the end of the night? Would the staff sit around and—and have cocktails in the dining room after closing hours?

GE: Uh, one time [clears throat] let me tell you. When I started working they had a tradition there. We wouldn’t—we weren’t getting paid to be bartenders. And what the system was—the owners, they established that system, the owner of the place. Uh, after the end of the evening [at] nine o’clock, you have the right [to have] two drinks. Regular drinks. Not expensive ones, just regular. So everybody had to have two drinks. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

GE: Until, uh, I think a guy got drunk and broke his arm, and they cut off the drinks, you know.

AE: Oh, my.

GE: But that was a way to let you—you served drinks all day—being viewed as a, you know—but, uh, that was before [nineteen] ninety-seven that they cut it off. Yeah. Even, uh, I think the—the owner used to work—he used to give drinks to the cooks in the beginning. One drink. To start the day. That's all.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: Well you work good—because they become successful. This is, uh, the way he handles management, you know. As far as people, you know. But, uh, it worked. I don't know how good their drinks are now [short laugh], but I guess they're all right. [Laughs]

AE: Have you ever gone to Galatoire's as a customer?

GE: No. Never.

AE: No?

GE: Well after I left [clears throat]—after I left, uh, you know, a lot of events came out, and so we went into legal things with them. Eh, you know, I could have gone. But I didn't ever, you know. [Laughs]

AE: And so now you're waiting tables at Tommy's—

GE: Tommy's, yeah.

AE: —Restaurant. And what is it like over there?

GE: Tommy's is, uh, since they opened [clears throat] about a—a year and a half [ago], it's been probably the most successful restaurant. [Voted] by the newspaper, by the *Times-Picayune*.

AE: Mm-hmm.

GE Uh, we've been busy. And we have, uh, at that time we, uh, when I left, they push the chef to Galatoire's to resign. So I told Tommy [Andrade, the owner] to—Tommy used to own Irene's [Restaurant]. You know Irene's?

AE: Yeah, I've heard there was a connection there.

GE: So they broke up—

AE: Yeah.

GE: And then he bought it—she bought it out—[and] he put his own restaurant. So I said, "What are you going to put a restaurant—like the same menu and everything? Why should I come to your restaurant if I am loyal to

Tom—to Irene’s?” “Well,” he said, “what do you recommend?” “I recommend you hire the chef from Galatoire’s and do the Galatoire’s specials.” So that’s what exactly we [are] doing. Fifty [sound of chair being dragged across the floor]—fifty percent of each.

AE: Really?

GE: Yeah.

AE: So part Galatoire’s [menu] and part Irene’s?

GE: Right.

AE: Interesting.

GE: We have two chefs.

AE: Interesting.

GE: And, uh, what he did is, uh, instead of hav[ing] just Italian food you—you diversify the market. So you get people who don’t like one thing, they like the other. So they—they’re right—they’re happy. But when you have certain items only [a customer might say,] “Oh, no, they don’t have what I like.” You know? That’s it. And the menu’s pretty extensive, you know, so—

AE: Have there been some clients that have—

GE: Yeah.

AE: —customers that have followed you there because of your association with Galatoire’s.

GE: Yeah, a lot of people from Galatoire’s go there. Yeah. They know that I’m there, so I’m waiting on them. Yeah.

AE: And do they have a bartender at Tommy’s?

GE: Right. That’s, uh, the guy that they, uh, they have a bartender—

AE: Yes, you mentioned him [before recording began. He comes up again in the interview later on.]  
[Short pause]

AE: Do they serve, uh, many cocktails over here? Any of the traditional New Orleans cocktails?

GE: Yeah, yeah. They serve, uh, they're pretty good. They serve—I would say mostly cocktails that you, you know, you can find in a restaurant.

AE: Um-hmm. What's the clientele like over there?

GE: I would say eighty percent is local, uh, twenty percent tourists. When these conventions—all these hotel send all the people. So with the locals it is very hard to get in once you, you know, they—the tourists make their reservations.

AE: Right.

GE: But that's a nice, uh, ratio, you know? Because any restaurant, uh, the backbone are the regular customers.

AE: Sure.

GE: Tourists be all right. As a compliment, you know. But then in summer time or—that's when Galatoire's has done the best. The backbone with its regular customers.

AE: And are you a drinking man yourself?

GE: I don't know—drinking man. [Laughs] I drink but not that much.

AE: Yeah.

GE: You know, it's, uh [short pause] nothing special, you know.

AE: Um, well you mentioned, um, John at Tommy's Restaurant—

GE: Right.

AE: —who has bartended all his life in New Orleans. And then also Gina at the Bombay Club, who has bartended for some time.

**[COUNTER: 26:10]**

GE: Right.

AE: And has one a bunch of awards.

GE: Yeah, she's been voted the best in New Orleans.

AE: Yeah? Are there and other, um—

GE: Uh, bartenders?

AE: —bartenders you can think of? Yeah, who have been around for a while.

GE: Uh, in the—Tommy's [Restaurant] you can interview Dean.

AE: Okay.

GE: Dean [will] be there—in case John is not there, Dean will be there. And he's been a bartender too at another restaurant all his life.

AE: Yeah?

GE: Um, let's see [short pause] No. But your best bet is Gina.

AE: Oh, yeah? Okay.

GE: Because the Bombay Club specialize[s] in drinks. You understand? It's a bar—you ever been there?

AE: No, I have not.

GE: It's around—you can from here—it's around there. And it's famous for the best martini bar in the city. And they have a restaurant too, which I worked there for a while. And, uh, it was two blocks from—from Galatoire's. And she—they have a list, which is the good thing. The list is a little booklet with all the martinis. All the names, you know, the names. They have like eighty-five, a hundred martinis. Different martinis. Completely different. You have to know what you're doing because I mean [laughs] ultimately—they have all kind of names, you know.

AE: Yeah?

GE: So if there is a better bar, that's the one.

AE: Yeah?

GE: And Gina, yeah.

AE: Well I'll have to check that out.

GE: She—yeah. She should be, uh, usually she is there by three o'clock, three thirty.

AE: Okay. Um—

GE: And if you go to Tommy's, you can call him and, uh, you can interview Dino or John.

AE: Okay.

GE: You know.

AE: I'd be very interested in that. Um, well do you have any thoughts or ideas about New Orleans as a kind of traditional cocktail culture and the history and tradition of cocktails that have come from New Orleans, specifically?

GE: Well, uh [short pause] people in New Orleans drink a lot. I think they drink more than any city, I think. I mean, really. You have twenty-five hundred—twenty-five hundred restaurants. Only—*only* in New Orleans. We're not talking [about anything in] Metairie or anything. And, uh, basically they have—they have people that like to have a good time. Eat well, you know. They like eat—to live in other words. That's one of the passions: to eat, drink, you know, and have a good time. That's what makes it different—the city so entertaining, you know. [Clears throat]

[Short pause]

AE: There are these bars like, you know, if—if Galatoire's is known maybe not necessarily more for its Café Brulot but—all these restaurants that have these signature drinks that are, um, complicated cocktails that people come here specifically to have, you know. Whether it's a Sazerac or a Hurricane or a Café Brulot and—

GE: Right. No, the only one I—that I know of and has been winning every year is the Bombay Club.

AE: Yeah.

GE: You see, they have dining, and if you check in there—the Bombay Club is the best. And they have so many drinks it's unreal.

AE: [Laughs]

GE: You know?

AE: Yeah.

GE: It's unreal in a way [clears throat]—in a way it's good. If you are in a bar, you—you have a drink. But the drinks at the Bombay Club, you're talking about eleven, twelve dollars. And it's six ounces. So what it means, if I serve you a drink like that, you want to take your time before you eat. Understand? Timing is important. If you—you know, you have so many tables. [Laughs] So in the dining—if you are too busy, it's hard to be able turn tables over with drinks like that. Yeah, because you want to finish your drink before you order. And then you have wine. [Laughs]

AE: Right. They could be there for a while.

**[COUNTER: 3012]**

GE: So it's a little—but, uh [short pause] that's a [short pause] what is it I was going to tell you about the bartenders? [Short pause] Bartenders and waiters are—are, uh [short pause] you know, similar in the—in the way they are and they think sometimes. Because in—not because just only they're in the same business. It's just, uh, uh [laughs] difficult people. You know? Especially bartenders. It's, uh, hard to get along [with them]. They are, you know—they want you to keep your distance, you know, don't put too much pressure on them. They say to them, "Oh, no, I wan my drink like this! Like that!" That's the—that's the problem. [A waiter might say to a bartender,] "He wants, uh, his drink not too sweet with this and that." Many ingredients, you know. They have to get—to get off of it. What about, uh, this place that, uh, across [from] Galatoire's? The back door? They have [the] Chateau Sonesta [Hotel].

AE: I don't know. I've never heard of it.

GE: Yeah, they have a beautiful—in the back there—in the back door of Galatoire's which [is] facing Iberville [Street]? Right here? [Points in the direction of Iberville]

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: They have a hotel, and they have a big bar there. They have good bartenders. We used to go drink there. They have a bartender—I don't know if he's still there—Jonathan.

AE: Okay.

GE: He's, uh, good. He's been there, I mean, he's been there for a while.

AE: Yeah?

GE: And that's—that's another guy you can, you know, if you have—

AE: Well that's a unique thing about bartending—or about New Orleans, rather, is that there are a lot of career bartenders and career waiters that tend to stay in the business for—

GE: Right.

AE: —decades. What is that? Do you think it's just a good way to earn a living or something else?

GE: I think—I think they like it. They—the—because I don't think you're going to stay there unless—in a profession or a trade—unless you like it.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: You have to like it.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: Otherwise you arrange for when you get out of it.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: And that's happened even with the waiters that *think* they're going to make it, you know? They reach a point that that's it. They can't do it no more. They going to do different things. It take some—some qualities to stay in it, you know. It's not just, uh—you have to put up with a lot of pressure. You have to control the [clears throat] the business pressure. You know?

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: And that's one of the things. Otherwise you'll crack up, you know? Just—there are many people like that. They just start losing it. You know.

AE: Well what have you enjoyed most about your job over the years?

GE: In New Orleans?

AE: About being in the service industry and having regular customers and—

GE: Well, it's uh—uh, when they request you, I guess.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: Because, uh, they expect you to perform, you know. And, uh, they are your friends. And you please your friends. And the best rewards, not only the words—the friendship [short pause]—[but] the—the way they tip. It's a manifestation of appreciation. I waited—I waited on many families. Generations. [Clears throat] And, uh, when I had the problem with Galatoire's [Gilberto was accused of sexual harassment by a female employee], this is—this is kind of a sociological phenomenon, but the people stick their neck [out] for me. You know? And they said—and they even told me, "No! We don't want you to be worried. We want to make a petition to the board of directors." But, uh, I want[ed] to work at Commander's [Palace], but no, if you work it loses—it loses the—"Oh, he's working already," you know. So that means [that] I'm not too interested. It's *you* that's interested. So I had to, you know, follow things that way. And, uh, I was, uh, it reached the point where it reached, you know. That, uh, nobody

believed the accusations of the—of the management. To the point that, uh, I don't know. Have you seen the website? [<http://www.welovegilberto.com/>]

AE: Yes, I have. Yeah. I've read an awful lot about it.

GE: To the point that, uh—

AE: I understand there was a [theatrical] play [about you] also. [*The Galatoire's Monologues*]

GE: Right.

AE: [Laughs]

**[COUNTER: 34:56]**

GE: I have—yeah. And, uh—So they never thought it could turn that way. So in a way they are underestimating me, really. Actually, I never was a waiter [before]. I, uh, have three college degrees. I have a college degree in business administration, agricultural engineering and agronomy. I had these jobs in Peru, you know. But I had to do something different. And Galatoire's made *me* stay there. You know. So [short pause] and very few people knew about that. [Short laugh] You, right now. But I never talk about it.

AE: Yeah.

GE: It's, uh, [sound of chair being dragged across the floor] I didn't see the point, you know, talking about these aspects. But, uh, it was good.

AE: Yeah.

GE: Now we going to a [clears throat] the legal system. Which I'm pretty confi—confident in, you know. They don't have, uh, too much of anything so—[short pause] Right now, uh, with the new laws, you have to follow procedures first. Investigate. They [Galatoire's] never did that. They though it was, uh, they follow the accusations like, "Oh, she told me [so] you're fired."

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: And that's not how it works.

AE: Very one-sided, yeah.

GE: And they never ask me questions, nothing. So it was like—So you just got married?

AE: I did. Three weeks ago.

GE: That's so nice. So you still on honeymoon?

AE: Well, we had the honeymoon, and now it's back to work so I came here and—[Laughs]

GE: [Laughs] Yeah.

AE: —and home again tomorrow.

GE: Yeah.

AE: So it's back to the real world but—a happy time, yeah.

GE: Well, I hope hat I helped you. Of course, the bartender industry is—is going on and growing every year. Drinking, you know?

AE: Yeah.

GE: So this is one of the oldest bars in the city, you know that?

AE: At the—

GE: Right here.

AE: —Athletic Club? Really?

GE: This is over a hundred and fifty years old. Yeah.

AE: Yeah?

GE: Just look at it.

AE: How long have you been a member here?

GE: Uh, since I came to New Orleans in nineteen seventy-nine.

AE: Oh, okay.

GE: Um-hmm—you know. I was—it has everything. So, uh, sometimes I come, take my shower here, take—go to work. But, uh—

AE: And it was a men's club primarily—

GE: Before, right.

AE: When did—

GE: Used to be [that] they didn't allow women.

AE: When did that end?

GE: Uh, until, uh— it's like Galatoire's. They didn't allow women until nineteen ninety-five, six, they hired the first woman. And probably the first black [employee they hired] in [nineteen] ninety-seven. They had, um, they [laughs]—but here it was men's, right.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: I went—you—even if you brought somebody, they wouldn't let you.

AE: Yeah?

GE: And times change, so now it's—you know, we have like twenty-five hundred members.

AE: Yeah.

GE: All of New Orleans comes here.

AE: So what was—what was the scene like here in the bar before the—

GE: Here?

AE: Yeah.

GE: Later on it gets real crowded here.

AE: Yeah?

GE: It's party time, yeah. Especially [on] Friday, Saturday night. Yeah, it's, uh—of course, you are limited on the number, you know, they don't have that—they can't keep up with that many liquors, you know?

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: They don't sell enough.

AE: Are there bartenders here that have been here for a long time at the bar at the Athletic Club?

GE: Huh? Yeah, they come at three o'clock. That's when they come, at three o'clock. It would be good if you want to interview. They say they open at three. I just put the lights on [in here] so we could talk.

AE: Yeah.

GE: But, uh, yeah, at three o'clock comes the bartender.

AE: And has that bartender been here for a long time?

GE: Yeah. I think so, yeah.

AE: Okay.

GE: There was a place—I don't know if it's still open. It's—it's a new place called Rasputin[*'s Restaurant*]. Rasputin is probably it's on, uh, I don't know if you know the Lafayette Hotel?

AE: Mmm, no.

[Man walks through the bar and greets Gilberto]

GE: [To man] How you doing? Good to see you.

MAN: How are you?

GE: [To man] All right.

AE: [To man] Hello.

GE: [To interviewer] The Lafayette Hotel? Rasputin. It has a dri—a hundred different types of vodka.

AE: Wow.

GE: They have a beautiful bar. Probably they—they might be open tonight. It's a, uh, in the six hundred block of Saint Charles.

AE: Okay.

GE It's not too far so—

AE: Okay. [Short pause] Well do you have some particularly fond moments of your time at Galatoire's when you were still serving the drinks? Um, some stories of regular customers or times there.

**[COUNTER: 38:57]**

GE: Well, uh, let me tell you, one day—I used to wait on this, uh, old lady. You know, very smart, very—a character in New Orleans. And one day she asked for—asked her for some drinks it's called—they had this French guy. So she said, "Let me ask you to fix him a special drink." So the drink was, uh, some kind of liquor with a little flame on top. So I served it to him on

flames. You know, the little—and she told—he—they drink—he—they were all—the drink and all the flames went in—on her arm, you know.

AE: Down her arm? Oh, my gosh.

GE: So I kind of rubbed it and nothing [makes wiping motion with hands]—but nothing happened. She didn't have a burn, nothing! [Laughs] I'll never forget that. It's funny because suddenly, I serve the drinks, and she's on flames, you know, all over! [Laughs]

AE: Oh, my goodness. [Laughs] That's quite dramatic.

GE: [Laughing] It's, uh, a [laughs] the—that's one of those things that I happened not to [unintelligible]. I couldn't understand these guys. A party of ten. And he asked me for—I understood bitters, you know. So [short pause] I don't know, it [was] so noisy. It's like Galatoire's, the acoustics is bad so it's noisy. And so—so they order coffee and they want bitters—in—they—you know, people from different regions might [short pause]—So I serve—one of the guys that asked me—the bitters. So then he drank it—it was coffee. And he drank it. So I said—then one of the ladies said, "We wanted Bailey's!" [I said, "Oh, Bailey's" So I went and brought four Bailey's. So the guy asked me, "What was that?" [I said,] "Well, you drank it, huh? Bitters!" [Laughs]

AE: Oh, no. [Laughs]

GE: [The man said,] "And what is that?"

AE: Oh, no!

GE: And I said, "That's a—that's an additive to mix drinks. But in reality," I said, "those are digestive too. It's good for, uh, like flatulence, you know. Different things." [Laughs] And so they were laughing because he didn't know what it was. He thought it was Bailey's probably.

AE: Right, but he drank it anyway. Oh, my goodness. Wow.

GE: [Laughing]

AE: Very different taste sensation, that. [Laughs]

GE: But, uh [short pause] it's kind of hard to remember all the stories.

AE: Um-hmm.

[Short pause]

GE: In Galatoire's.

[Short pause]

AE: Do you have any ideas about retiring anytime, or are you going to remain in the industry?

GE: Yeah, probably a couple of years.

AE: Yeah?

GE: Yeah. Yeah. Actually, uh, I don't know. I'm considering maybe opening a restaurant. A Peruvian restaurant.

AE: Really?

GE: Yeah. So I [am] just, uh, waiting for this legal situation to get over.

AE: Um-hmm. And have the right time.

GE: [Laughs] And then we'll see. But yeah, New Orleans is the place to open restaurants. People are always in search of different types of food. They—I mean, you open—all the restaurants, new things—even, uh, Middle East[ern] restaurants. Unique. Iran[ian]. Successful. People go—like to eat different things. They [are] not just—they [are not] used to one type, you know, of food.

AE: What kind of things would you serve at your Peruvian restaurant?

GE: Well—

AE: What's the traditional food?

GE: Peruvian? They have, uh, a lot of typical plates. It's, uh [short pause]—Peru is located in the—in the Pacific [Ocean] and they have mountains and the jungle. And in these different regions, you kind of—you have the—the ideal soil [and] climate relationship to produce ingredients that you can't reproduce anywhere else. So everything comes through Lima [the capital city], all these ingredients. And they—the cuisine of Peru is considered by the *New York Times* like the first—first place in the universe. So it's all kind of, uh, of uh, dishes that they make with fish, chicken—I mean, it all this—it's unreal. Very complex. Uh, but it's, uh, everybody [who] goes to Peru, the first thing—"You ever been to Peru?" "Yeah." "The food—" That's the only—that's the number [one] thing they tell you. So my idea is to bring probably a chef and bring the ingredients and use—the results for, you know, seafood, you know.

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: But is—probably that is near.

AE: That's exciting.

GE: And we'll be serving Pisco Sours [Pisco is a distilled liquor made from grapes]. You know, Pisco Sour is probably the most famous in drink in South America. [It's] originally from Peru. It's—I wish—if I knew I would have—I have some envelopes I could have given you some. I don't know. Well, [if] you give me your address, maybe I can send you some.

**[COUNTER: 45:09]**

AE: Okay.

GE It's just, uh, you do it with the blender.

AE: Uh-huh.

GE: And, uh, tomorrow I got a guy that is bringing it from Peru. My friend is coming. And you mix it [short pause] and, I mean, like at Tommy's—at work people say, "Where you from? Peru? You have any Pisco Sour?" We call it—it's made with Pisco. It's different. It's not like a whiskey sour here; this is made in a blender and all that. But it's, uh, good taste and good effect too you know?

AE: Yeah?

GE: Makes you—

AE: [Laughs] Are there other drinks native to Peru that you would have—

GE: No that's—that's the most—the most popular there. Famous for it.

AE: And so is the Mojito, is that more of a Brazilian drink?

GE: That's, uh, more Mexican.

AE: Mexican?

GE: Mexico, yeah. [The Mojito actually originated in Cuba.]

[Short pause]

GE: Yeah.

[Short pause]

AE: Well, I wish you the best of luck with that restaurant endeavor. That would be—

GE: Well—

AE: —most exciting.

GE: I've had other people so—just put it together, you know?

AE: Do you cook at home?

GE: No. My wife does. She's a good cook. And, [sound of chair being dragged across the floor] uh, but uh, my idea is to bring a chef from Peru and really, yeah, put it together.

AE: Have you been back to Peru many times since you've been in New Orleans?

GE: Yeah, I go every year.

AE: Do you?

GE: Yeah. [I] go every year. To eat, mostly.

AE: Yeah? [Laughs]

GE: But we have a different system in Latin America, and it's in Peru. It's a—most of the people [that are] middle class, you have maids. They cook for you have, uh, another one that lives in your house and cleans the house. So that is—they still—they still have kind of forced to do that. Because they're no jobs, so most people have to work at whatever. So the people—the families are demanding. They want fresh products. Sometimes they go every day—the maid goes every day to the market and brings things, you know. It's, uh, different situation.

AE: Um-hmm. And you've enjoyed enough in New Orleans enough to stay.

GE: Oh, yeah. Right. I've been here twenty-five years now. Yeah, it's fine. After living [in] New Orleans, I wouldn't live anywhere else.

AE: Really?

GE: In the [United] States.

AE: Okay.

GE: In the [United] States. It's kind of hard.

AE: Have you traveled throughout the states much?

GE: Yeah, been to New York, Los Angeles, yeah. It's—

AE: And when you go to a place like New York, and people ask you what you do or—

GE: Not really. You know, you know, it's a big city so—

AE: Um-hmm.

GE: But, uh, uh—it's just everything is around. Even for conventions it's good because there—there are some nearby all the places. You walk. In big cities you make a convention—from one place to another is something different. It's not all together in one location.

AE: Yeah. [Short pause] Well, um, I might just ask you if you have any final thoughts about drinking in New Orleans and [laughs]—

GE: I don't know.

AE: —serving drinks.

GE: Serving drinks? Well [short pause] uh, no. As long as I'm pleasing the customers. [Laughs]

AE: Right.

GE: It's just, uh, that's part of the meal. Key ingredient. To the meal, to the meal. But, uh, I hope, you know, it's helped you some.

AE: Sure, yes.

GE: It's a little different because I don't know what—bartending—I didn't bartend but, you know, to, you know—

AE: Right, well that's part of the New Orleans culture and, uh, you know—

GE: Right. Yeah, right.

AE: —and the tradition of waiters and wait staff in these old restaurants, so that's part of it, definitely.

GE: That's right.

AE: Well, and I appreciate your time. Thank you.

GE: Oh, anytime. And, uh, we'll keep in touch.

AE: Okay.

GE: I've got your card, so I'm going to send you some Pisco Sour.

AE: Okay, I look forward to it.

GE: So you have it when you get home.

AE: [Short laugh]

**[COUNTER: 49:29]**

**[END]**