

JACQUELINE SALSER
Chez Jacqueline – Breaux Bridge, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen, Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Project: Southern Gumbo Trail – Louisiana

[Begin Jacqueline Salser Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Thursday, August 13, 2008. I'm in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, with Miss Jacqueline. Could I get you to say your full name and your birth date, and tell me how you make your living.

00:00:17

Jacqueline Salser: My name is Jacqueline Salser. My birthday is November 3, 1944. I'm only 63—go[ing] on 40. *[Laughs]* My living is a restaurant, little restaurant in Breaux Bridge.

00:00:32

SR: And the name of the restaurant?

00:00:36

JS: The name of the restaurant is Chez Jacqueline, after my name.

00:00:40

SR: Thank you, and could you tell me your heritage?

00:00:45

JS: What you mean?

00:00:48

SR: Where—where you grew up?

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JS: I grew up in France 20 miles from Paris in the country. You would say the woods; I say the forest. Or you would say the woods. I would say the forest. My parents used to have a restaurant in France and I grow up in the restaurant business.

00:01:10

SR: Oh, okay, and what kind of restaurant did they have?

00:01:12

JS: It was French—French, French, French; it was a beautiful restaurant. Mainly in France you sit outside under the tree because there's no bug, there's no mosquitoes, no flies, no anything, so the inside is very small but the outside area is very big because it's a huge garden. I could sit 200 people outside.

00:01:36

SR: What about in the winter?

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JS: In the winter it's pretty tough [*Laughs*] because if it's very cold where the—the inside of the restaurant is always small—always, most of the time everywhere you go over in France other than a big city.

00:01:54

SR: What was the name of the town where you grew up, or where the restaurant was?

00:01:58

JS: The restaurant first of all is called L'auberge Du Cedre and the town is Fourqueux, and I'm going to spell it: F-o-u-r-q-u-e-u-x.

00:02:14

SR: Could you spell the name of the restaurant?

00:02:15

JS: L-'a-u-b-e-r-g-e—space—D-u—space—C-e-d-r-e.

00:02:28

SR: And what does that mean?

00:02:33

JS: Like you said an *oak tree* and that's the same thing in France. Wherever a huge tree, it's a cedre.

00:02:41

SR: And so that's interesting to me that you grew up in the restaurant business. Was the—the food at your parents' restaurant anything like the food you serve here?

00:02:50

JS: The French menu, yes. It's exactly like my mom and dad. But I also serve Cajun.

00:02:59

SR: Well tell me a little bit about what brought you to this area and when.

00:03:06

JS: I'm 19 years in Louisiana. I've been 38 years in USA and 19 years in Louisiana. What bring me there in the USA is my ex-husband. *[Laughs]* And in Louisiana I came because I wanted to see Louisiana. I used to work for the Hilton Inn—Hilton Inn—as F&B [Food & Beverage] Director. And this little restaurant is mine, and I just came in here because I wanted to—I'm very adventurous. I like to go places and look on and see what's going on. *[Laughs]*

00:03:46

SR: And before you came to Louisiana where did you live in the United States?

00:03:49

JS: Dallas, Texas. But I've been all over—to Key West, Florida; to Anchorage, Alaska.

00:03:57

SR: Wow. And so—so you worked for the Hilton in what town? Was that in New Orleans or—?

00:04:04

JS: No. Everywhere I worked for the Hilton Inn.

00:04:09

SR: Oh okay, and you settled in this town in 19 years ago?

00:04:15

JS: Nineteen years ago but the restaurant is only five years ago, and I quit the work for somebody else and I work for myself now.

00:04:23

SR: Well I really like Breaux Bridge but I'm wondering what it was about this place that made a French woman want to stay.

00:04:34

JS: Well I came in here and I looked around and talked to people and everything. We— everywhere I've been around in the USA, and many places and everything, *this* is a place that's really, really charming and people are so sweet, so nice, so welcome you and everything. So this is a big, big thing for me.

00:04:54

SR: Did you feel—you know, people here feel like there's a big French influence. As a French person coming over here, did you feel like there's French influence in this area?

00:05:09

JS: No, not for me. Maybe for the rest of the people but not for me. I feel like I was at home.

00:05:14

SR: You felt like what?

00:05:17

JS: I was at home.

00:05:20

SR: So maybe it did resonate a little bit—European or something.

00:05:25

JS: I feel like I was at home and everyday when people come to the restaurant they say they're at home too. **[Laughs]** So it feels good.

00:05:35

SR: Yeah. What about the cooking in this area? Was any of it familiar?

00:05:44

JS: Oh no. Everything is spicy and spicy and spicy and I don't care for spicy food. Everything is spicy, spicy. All my French food have no spice—no salt, no pepper—and all my spice come from France and the ingredients is all mixed together so you don't miss the salt; you don't miss the pepper.

00:06:03

SR: What do you use in place of salt and pepper? Like herbs and—?

00:06:07

JS: Herbs. Like lots of herbs like Herbes de Provence; it's wonderful to cook with Herbes de Provence. They give you all the taste you need.

00:06:16

SR: And so when you—when you cook the Cajun food or Louisiana food, do you cook it or does somebody else?

00:06:25

JS: No, I cook it. I cook it. I cook it with love. That's what I told my customer. I cook all of my food with love—like the gumbo or étouffée or the bisque. They look at it and say, *Hmm, that's not what we're used to.* And I say, *Well taste it.* And they taste it and they say it's the best thing they remember in their life.

00:06:48

SR: So even the gumbo and étouffée you make with your own style?

00:06:53

JS: With my own style, with my ingredients from France and everything.

00:07:00

SR: That's—that's what I noticed last year when I had your gumbo, which is why I wanted to come by. It was so delicious and yet not typical of this region. Can you describe your gumbo for me?

00:07:12

JS: Yeah, I can describe it a little bit [*Laughs*] because it's—everything from France is hard to describe. But first thing is your roux. Your roux is like every—everywhere else. If you can make a light roux, dark roux—I don't like dark roux. I like light roux. And with all the ingredients you mix it and everything and you come like a creamy—I would say creamy orange sauce—and it tastes so good. You say, *Oh, yum, yum*; you want to eat some more.

00:07:46

SR: So do you make your roux with butter and flour or with oil?

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JS: Butter and flour. We don't use no oil in there; no margarine. [*Laughs*]

00:07:57

SR: And when you talk about the ingredients from France that go in the gumbo, can you tell me what those are or is it a secret?

00:08:04

JS: No, I can't. [*Laughs*]

00:08:05

SR: Well without divulging—. I'll ask you some more about the gumbo and without divulging any secrets maybe you can tell me a little bit more. So I'm guessing that you—it's a seafood gumbo, right?

00:08:18

JS: Seafood gumbo, crawfish étouffée, and I do a crawfish bisque and I stuff the head of the crawfish.

00:08:22

SR: You do?

00:08:26

JS: Yes.

00:08:28

SR: That's very traditional.

00:08:29

JS: Yeah, it is hard. Most people told me, *Why you do this? Do it the simple way. Make little like a meatball, little boulette, and dump it.* And I say, *Why I want to do this when I can stuff it and it looks so much pretty than a—a [inaudible] and floating in the gumbo,* you know.

00:08:49

SR: It is pretty, the stuffed heads.

00:08:54

JS: Yeah.

00:08:56

SR: So it's a seafood gumbo. There is no meat in your gumbo, is there?

00:08:59

JS: No, it's plenty of seafood. It's not like floating around cup or—it's plenty of seafood, plenty, plenty, plenty; no fish. It's just fresh, like crabmeat, crab claw, oyster, shrimp, everything you can think— seashell is in the gumbo, but no fish.

00:09:26

SR: I think I remember scallops. Is that—?

00:09:29

JS: Scallops, scallops, yes.

00:09:32

SR: And do you get your seafood from this area or does that come from France as well?

00:09:36

JS: No, [*Laughs*] they come from New Orleans, from the seafood place.

00:09:42

SR: And what about, you know Louisiana cooks use—they refer to the trinity of seasoning vegetables. Not everybody uses all of the trinity, but it's celery, onion and green bell pepper. Do you cook with the trinity?

00:09:55

JS: I just—not on the seafood gumbo. On the étouffée—I put bell pepper and onions only in the étouffée.

00:10:06

SR: Is there a comparable French trinity in French cooking?

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JS: Yeah, but there's all kinds of trinity—all kinds. Like this incident for Saturday I'm making blanquette de veau, where it's veal. You have all kind of spice, all kind of spice. You name it, it's inside.

00:10:33

SR: That's my husband's favorite dish; he's from Belgium. We might have to come back.

[Laughs]

00:10:41

JS: **[Laughs]** It's good.

00:10:41

SR: And so is that for your eight-course meal that you're doing?

00:10:44

JS: It's—it's supposed to be eight-course but now it's 10-course, which we share the 10-course. That's okay. **[Laughs]**

00:10:53

SR: And do you do that a lot?

00:10:54

JS: I do this once a month—once a month. And it's different dish every month.

00:11:00

SR: That sounds fun. And people make reservations ahead of time?

00:11:03

JS: You have to. They have to. Like this Saturday we are booked.

00:11:08

SR: Oh so I can't come?

00:11:09

JS: You can sit at the bar.

00:11:11

SR: Oh okay. *[Laughs]*

00:11:13

JS: We will take care of you good. *[Laughs]*

00:11:16

SR: And the seafood gumbo, it also tasted to me like you made a seafood stock. Is that right?

00:11:24

JS: Not exactly—not exactly, but it’s good. [*Laughs*] She tried to get my recipe; she will not get it.

00:11:33

SR: Well I’m just trying to see how—what the similarities might be. Before you moved to the United States, I guess—because they might have had gumbo in Texas—had you heard of gumbo?

00:11:42

JS: No, not at all. I heard of crawfish; matter of fact, I had crawfish in Colorado. My mother was there from France and she was on the ditches—coulee you call it in Colorado; I guess it’s the coulee—and she said, *Look, look, look*. And I never knew what crawfish was and she said, *This is crawfish. It’s good; it’s good*. So she’d get it and pick it up and put it in a bucket and cook it. It was absolutely marvelous. I never see crawfish before.

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SR: What—what is a coulee?

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JS: Coulee is like little—you call it a bayou in here. Over there they call it the coulee.

00:12:29

SR: So your mom figured out how to cook the crawfish?

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JS: Yes, it was good. [*Laughs*]

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SR: Do you like the traditional Cajun gumbos?

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JS: No, and you don't want me to tell you what I describe.

00:12:49

SR: No?

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JS: I describe it as a dishwater. [*Laughs*] Like if you do the dishes, you know, and the—your water is kind of green or gray; that's what I describe the gumbo from here. I'm sorry but [*Laughs*]—.

00:13:06

SR: It's okay. That's why I wanted to talk to you. [*Laughs*] So I guess you don't eat out much here.

00:13:09

JS: No. If I go eat out—. Well yesterday I was eating—what do you call it? —fajita, Mexican food. I go eat Mexican or I go eat Chinese or I go eat Italian. Three places I go. **[Laughs]**

00:13:31

SR: So it wasn't the food that made you fall in love with this place?

00:13:23

JS: No, no, the people. The people, the kindness, and I couldn't stay in Lafayette. Lafayette is a big city and everything. But I don't like big city. I'm born in the country and I still am in the country and I love the country.

00:13:50

SR: What about, do you go back to France?

00:13:53

JS: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, oh yeah. For the food because I can't get the food here and do what we do in France. I mean not—not all the food. Some food I cannot get. And I get over there and I eat everything that I cannot eat here.

00:14:13

SR: So what kinds of things do you import from France to here? Like, I'm guessing like cheeses or patés or—?

00:14:20

JS: Any type of can you can ship it. No, paté—paté you can ship it because they come in a can. But now we have—and for people who do not know—Fresh Market at Lafayette. They have all the paté you can have—very, very good. And they have all the French cheese, imported from France—not imported from USA; imported from France—and they are wonderful. Expensive but good. So people need to know about this. And you know where is the fresh market? River Ranch.

00:15:04

SR: Oh okay; I've never been in that area but people have told—were telling me about it last night.

00:15:09

JS: Yeah, it is good—good—good—good.

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SR: And so you probably bring herbs from France and—.

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JS: I have enough customers come in here and they'll say—I don't know them but they're from France and everything and they eat dinner. They love it and everything. We exchange cards. We exchange address and everything. And I'll say, *By the way, it will bother you if you ship me this and this and this. I give you money.*

No, we don't need your money. We will ship it as soon as we get home. So they ship me what I need right away. So I get pretty much what I want all year long, with customers. [Laughs]

00:15:45

SR: That's nice.

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JS: Yeah, it's cool. [Laughs]

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SR: Do you get a lot of French nationals coming through Breaux Bridge?

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JS: Lots—lots Belgium people; French; Quebec also. Quebec got everything from France so they can ship it quicker than French people. And everything, when I got—well you know the recipe in France they switch all the time. They get new recipe, new recipe, new recipe, so also when they come now I say, while you wait for your food write me a couple new recipes. So they write it out and I got some new recipes.

00:16:22

SR: Can you give me an example of some new recipes customers have given you?

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JS: Yeah. One we will try Saturday and I think it is excellent. That's why it is good is grapefruit. You get your grapefruit, cut it in two, and remove the inside, peel your grapefruit good, good, good; put it with crabmeat, little sugar because the grapefruit is like a tart—put a little homemade mayonnaise. If you don't know how to make it, get mayonnaise; mix it good; replenish your—your grapefruit and put some parsley over and put one boiled shrimp—big boiled shrimp—on the top for decoration. It is yummy—yummy. So the people will try it Saturday for my dinner.

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SR: And that's a new recipe imported from France?

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JS: From France, directly from France. *[Laughs]*

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SR: You were telling me earlier that when you were testing out that dish you were having customers taste it and they were giving their input. Were those customers local customers or French customers?

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JS: Local customers. I don't want French customers to taste. I want local so they can tell me, *No, it's no good; yes, it's good, yeah.* What you need; what you don't need. So it's fun—it's fun. And like you probably will think it's yucky. I didn't do it yet and I don't like cucumbers, but you peel your cucumber. You smash—smash—smash—smash like you're going to make mashed potatoes. Smash it good, good, good. And then you put a little salt, you put a little salt—pepper because it has to be a little spicy. Put a little bit and put sour cream and mix that together and it's cold soup.

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SR: Oh yum.

00:18:07

JS: So I'm going to try this today—before Saturday to make sure I get it right.

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SR: But you don't like cucumber?

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JS: I don't like cucumber, so somebody else is going to have to test it.

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SR: It sounds good to me. What about, you know people in Louisiana are—I've heard people often say that gumbo evolved from many things including French bouillabaisse.

00:18:34

JS: No. No, no, no. Bouillabaisse is completely separate. Bouillabaisse has its own broth. It takes 12 hours for to make the broth for bouillabaisse—12 hours to make the broth. You need the head of the shrimp, and crawfish if you want to. Slowly, slowly, slowly, and you add some ingredients inside so it don't taste bad or whatever. And then when your broth is done you also have saffron. You need to put saffron in; this is a big thing. Then when your broth is done you know you pass—you drain it and save it. Then bouillabaisse consists of oyster, clam, mussel, shrimp, and lobster; no sharp lobster. I had people told me Lafayette made bouillabaisse with a little chunk of lobster. No. Lobster have to be perfectly full with the head, with the body, and everything on the top. Yes, so—yummy, yummy—I make this maybe three times a year.

00:19:52

SR: Does the traditional French bouillabaisse have a roux in it?

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JS: Yes, your broth is the roux, but it's no—it's no—it's liquid(y). It's no fat like the gumbo. Nothing. And you don't use rice. You use little croutons and on top of the croutons you put a rouille. It's called a rouille. It's a mixture of, again, homemade mayonnaise with paprika, cayenne pepper, garlic, saffron—mix all together and put on a little crouton. And this is what you use to dip in your broth—your sauce or whatever you want to say it.

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SR: So there's no flour in a bouillabaisse?

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JS: No flour at all.

00:20:43

SR: So it doesn't sound similar to a gumbo at all.

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JS: Not at all. It's completely foreign from gumbo. **[Laughs]**

00:20:50

SR: Okay, I had a lot more questions. Let me just see; what about—oh, I wanted to ask you about the language here. Can you converse with the older generation that speaks French?

00:21:04

JS: Oh yes. I have seven every morning in here. **[Laughs]** They arrive at 7:30 and leave exactly at 8:35. I say, *Where you going?* Read the newspaper; go back home. But they're here for an hour and they speak French and everything. When I moved here 19 years ago I had to watch people. When you watch people and they say something to you, you can make sure what they want to say and what they want to do. Like for instance, the hood of the car. They call this the

capote. Well the capote is your jacket [*Laughs*]. It's not a capote; it's not the hood of the car. See and for the jacket it's—I forget what they say, but you have to—you have to watch their instinct, what they grab and what they say, so you can see what's going on.

00:22:05

SR: Right, because they use words that you don't recognize or they use them in strange ways.

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JS: Exactly, exactly; so you watch what is said and everything. It's how I learn English—the same thing.

00:22:17

SR: So it's a little bit like learning a different language, even the French here?

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JS: No, I don't understand everything you know but it's no problem.

00:22:26

SR: So the—the seven people who come in here in the morning, are they women or men?

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JS: All men, anything between 72 and 78 year-old. And they are hilarious. Everybody should come. You know at Lafayette they have at some other place there, it's called the French Table; a

bunch of French come together and talk. This can be a French table and people who like to speak French, they should come in the morning because it's interesting what they say. One is still working. One is a fisherman. One is a gardener. One is a swamp tour. One is a pharmacy. They all still working, but it's—and some don't do nothing [*Laughs*]. So people need to come and if they want to talk French, this is the best place to be.

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SR: Do they come on Saturday mornings?

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JS: Monday through Saturday; the only time they don't come is Sunday.

00:23:28

SR: What do they talk about?

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JS: Well they talk about everything. They talk politics, they talk *sex* [*Whispers; Laughs*]. They talk everything you can think and they have coffee, they have biscuits. Like one, he wants a dark biscuit, so he pick up the biscuit to the other man because his is darker than his. You had to be there to see.

00:23:54

SR: So what kind of coffee do you serve here? Is it the local kind?

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JS: Community. Community [Café] Speciale coffee. Everybody likes it, so it's good.

00:24:07

SR: Not the chicory?

00:24:09

JS: Not the chicory. Not too many people like chicory.

00:24:13

SR: I think maybe that's more of a New Orleans thing.

00:24:15

JS: Yeah.

00:24:16

SR: Do you like the coffee here?

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JS: Oh yeah. Yeah, I think it's—it's close to the French. French is even—the French coffee is a little bit bitterer than the Community, so Community is good. And you—with the Community

you can make espresso. The only thing you do, you put less water and you make very, very strong coffee.

00:24:41

SR: Right, it's dark.

00:24:42

JS: Very dark. The spoon can stand up.

00:24:46

SR: So I—when I was in here yesterday, and also today, it looked like you were doing a lot of the work here—the cooking and the serving—but I see someone here getting ready for lunch. Do you have—do you have a staff?

00:25:00

JS: Oh yeah, I do have a staff. In the morning nobody want to come to work in the morning. They're too tired. I'm here at 7 o'clock every morning. **[Laughs]** This morning at 7:30 I was busy—7:30 to 10 o'clock it was like 12 tables, cooking, serving, cleaning, everything. It's nothing for me. It's easy as pie.

00:25:25

SR: It's in your blood?

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JS: Yeah.

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SR: Are any of your staff French?

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JS: No. I would say yes, my daughter. She is from France; she is from Paris like me, but she don't speak too much.

00:25:42

SR: Not too much French?

00:25:43

JS: No, she listens better than she speaks it. [*Laughs*]

00:25:48

SR: And so is she—she grew up in France or she grew up in Texas?

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JS: Yeah, she grew up in France until she was seven years old.

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SR: And she works here?

00:25:58

JS: Yeah, we work as a family. It's a family restaurant owned. Granddaughter, husband, friend, everybody—not the dog but almost the dog can be working here. I make a joke. [*Laughs*]

00:26:13

SR: And so there is a next generation. There is a next generation of cooks in your family?

00:26:18

JS: Yeah; nah—nah. No, my daughter don't know how to cook. She refused to cook. The only person who really likes to cook after me would be my granddaughter. She loves to learn how to cook. She's 15 years-old. She loves to watch what I do and do after me and everything. So maybe she'll be the next cook.

00:26:39

SR: So she must have been born here.

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JS: Yes.

00:26:44

SR: And her father, is he Cajun?

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JS: No, he's from Oklahoma.

00:26:52

SR: Oh okay. So she's not Cajun either?

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JS: No, nobody is Cajun. [*Laughs*]

00:26:57

SR: And your granddaughter, what does she like to cook?

00:27:02

JS: Everything after me—everything. She cooks for her own self. I mean no big dinner but she cooks quite a bit. I should have said yes, we have one Cajun. My granddaughter who is four years-old, she's born in Louisiana. It's the only one born in Louisiana. Yeah, I was just thinking about it. We have one Cajun in the family.

00:27:27

SR: Does she have an accent?

00:27:32

JS: None at all. *[Laughs]*

00:27:35

SR: Let me see here. Where—do you go to New Orleans ever?

00:27:44

JS: Yes, I go to New Orleans, but I'm so busy and the only time I'm off is Tuesday and it's cleaning house.

00:27:55

SR: Yeah. I was just wondering if you sensed any French influence there because I know people in New Orleans feel like there's a French influence.

00:28:03

JS: No, I don't go enough.

00:28:08

SR: Has Breaux Bridge changed since you moved here?

00:28:14

JS: Yeah, it expands lot. It starts to expand more and more and more. It's more houses built; we have malls coming up. We have a big Super Wal-Mart, yeah.

00:28:28

SR: Did it always have this sort of—I feel like there’s sort of an artsy community feel to it. Did it always have that?

00:28:32

JS: In downtown Breaux Bridge, yes. Yes. And it’s nice because you can shop, eat, drink, sleep. You can do anything in downtown Breaux Bridge.

00:28:45

SR: Yeah, you can.

00:28:48

JS: And there’s lots of art. I mean I think—yeah, October 6th I think we have the big flea market, they call this. Also we have the art—art and craft is going to be there, so we have quite a bit of artists coming here and set up and paint and everything, so—.

00:29:10

SR: Yeah, it’s nice.

00:29:10

JS: It was last year a gentleman was in charge to the artists, so he was pushing more, so you know we have more artists and everything and it kind of died on unfortunately; not because him—because the town or whatever, you know. It was too hot or it’s too cold or—.

00:29:43

SR: Back to your roots a little bit: So at what point did you start cooking; how old were you?

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JS: Oh very little. I told them on the newspaper I was three years-old. I was three years-old, was on a crate—milk crate—what do you call them?

00:30:01

SR: Milk crate?

00:30:04

JS: Milk crate, and my daddy said, *Stir this, stir this, stir this*. Okay, okay. **[Laughs]** So I was young but it was fun. It was fun.

00:30:14

SR: And who was the main cook in the restaurant, your dad?

00:30:18

JS: My dad and my mom. Both of them. But my dad was a better cook than my mom.

00:30:25

SR: And the town where you lived, so it was inland. Did you serve seafood dishes there or was it mostly like meats and stuff?

00:30:34

JS: Mostly meat—mostly meat, some seafood, but I don't recall as much seafood. Poultry, pigeon, you know; chicken—lots of poultry, lots of beef, but not as much seafood.

00:30:50

SR: Can you just tell us from your menu—I haven't looked at a menu—but what some of the dishes are that you brought from that—?

00:30:58

JS: Rabbit—bunny foo foo. [*Laughs*] Your rabbit. As a matter of fact I'm going to go cook some for right now—pre-cook, you know, your rabbit. You have to because it takes a couple hours to cook, your rabbit, so you cannot cook it last minute. So you pre-cook for a little bit you know and let it simmer and put it on the side. So when you have it, it takes less time to cook it. Rabbit and chicken, yes.

00:31:26

SR: So like, would you called that braised rabbit?

00:31:29

JS: No. I cook my rabbit with—with red wine and I cook with mushrooms, fresh mushrooms, and everything. It's good; it's yummy, yummy. Veal cordon bleu, this is one thing we was doing lots. And lots of people do not understand veal cordon bleu because they're used to—in any restaurant it's frozen. They heat it up and put it on the pan and serve it. My veal is fresh. And after my veal I get Swiss cheese, ham; you know, and then put my egg, my batter and everything and cook my veal very slowly on both sides. This is the best veal you ever had. When people never eat veal I say, *Have it. I promise you.* They say, *Oh it's good. It's good; I will eat it again.*

00:32:28

SR: You're making me hungry. What about your chicken? Is that roast chicken?

00:32:31

JS: No. The same thing: cooked with wine. The rabbit is cooked with red wine; the chicken is cooked with white wine.

00:32:40

SR: Is your gumbo cooked with wine?

00:32:43

JS: No, but I create something with my chicken. It's called a chicken—poulet ménagère. So if you want to use the poulet—the chicken, you can just have it, but put on my menu, *Topped with crawfish étouffée.* This is my own recipe. So you get your rice; you put your chicken; you put

your mushroom, your sauce; and you put your crawfish *étouffée* on the top. People say it's a delight—delight; good food.

00:33:16

SR: That sounds like a local dish.

00:33:18

JS: So I wanted to do something nobody did and I did.

00:33:23

SR: Did you—in France did you eat a lot of rice?

00:33:27

JS: Mainly pasta—pasta, and potatoes.

00:33:36

SR: Your parents, are they still living?

00:33:39

JS: No, they passed.

00:33:42

SR: Did they come visit you in the United States?

00:33:43

JS: My mom, yes. Because my dad passed away 38 years ago when I moved here. So my mom was here every three months. She was here for—no, every three—yeah, every three months she was here for one month. So I bring her in, yeah.

00:33:58

SR: Oh that's good. And so she came to the Breaux Bridge area?

00:34:01

JS: Yeah, she—there's the last time she was here and she passed after she left here.

00:34:10

SR: So she could probably talk to the old-timers here too.

00:34:13

JS: Yes; yes, yes, yes.

00:34:12

SR: Has—has your French changed at all living here, like do you incorporate the local sort of slang?

00:34:22

JS: No, uh-um, I keep talking—especially with all the French people and the Quebequois; they all speak French, so—. And it’s so funny because when somebody came to the door you can recognize the French people or the Belgique people. *Bounjour! Comment ça va?*

00:34:42

SR: You know immediately?

00:34:42

JS: [*Laughs*] Every day they come to the door.

00:34:48

SR: So do you feel like—I mean it seems to me that you’re in this—in this place where there’s a lot of native culture but you’re bringing your own culture to these people it seems like.

00:35:01

JS: Yes; yes and no because we matched—typically when the French come, you know, I’m just like I’ve known them for ever and ever.

00:35:12

SR: No, but I mean to the natives.

00:35:13

JS: Yeah; oh yeah, oh yeah.

00:35:17

SR: Well I guess just one last question. What is it that you like most about your job?

00:35:20

JS: Everything. I love the work; I love to cook. I love to meet people. I love them to eat my food. And they say, *Oh, we love it*. Very, very rarely people are dissatisfied—very rarely. I mean it's maybe once every six months but no—no complaint; always happy, always want to coming back, always have good comment, always they feeling like they're at home when they are here. So it's good.

00:36:03

SR: It doesn't seem like you're looking toward retirement?

00:36:08

JS: No, I got plenty of time. **[Laughs]** People told me—a gentleman who comes in the morning, he said, You know what retirement is? It's when you're on Pellerin. Pellerin is a funeral home.

[Laughs] He called this is retirement.

00:36:24

SR: Well it's like—it's like the old men who come in here in the morning. People out here work a long time.

00:36:31

JS: Uh-hm, yeah, and the more you work the better you are. I mean why you want to stay at home? Watch soap opera? No.

00:36:39

SR: That's true.

00:36:42

JS: And you know you can clean your house so much.

00:36:48

SR: Right. Well you have a lot of energy. I just thought of one more question: When you go to France, if—when you make a visit is there anything that you miss eating from here?

00:36:55

JS: Oh no. I don't miss the gumbo; I don't miss nothing. I have so much things to eat over there that I didn't eat all year long or for two years. There's plenty, plenty, plenty. *[Laughs]*

00:37:07

SR: Do you—you were telling me that you preferred Rocky Sonnier's boudin [at Bayou Boudin & Cracklin']. Do you eat much boudin?

00:37:12

JS: No because it's not good for your cholesterol. But when I eat the boudin I go eat that Rocky. He's got good seafood boudin; he's got good pork boudin—very good boudin.

00:37:26

SR: It's different from French boudin.

00:37:28

JS: Yes. French is only the hog boudin, the blood boudin. That's the only thing we have, the blood boudin, but it's good too. Like the Quebequois tell me, the only boudin they have is blood boudin.

00:37:42

SR: They have that here in Breaux Bridge too.

00:37:44

JS: Yeah.

00:37:44

SR: One place.

00:37:47

JS: Yeah, blood boudin, but it's good. I mean if you don't know what you eat it's good. Some people probably go [*Gestures*] —I don't want this. [*Laughs*] But it's good.

00:37:56

SR: Do you ever cook from French cookbooks or is it all pretty much from—from your head?

00:38:01

JS: From my head [*Laughs*] and people say, *Can you give me the recipe?* I say, *I can't*. And they ask me, *Why?* I say, *I don't measure anything*. I go [*Gestures*] with my hand. I don't measure nothing, so it's hard for me to give anybody a recipe of anything. I don't use a spoon; I don't use a measuring cup; I don't—I don't use nothing.

00:38:30

SR: So you have to—how do you train your staff? They just have to watch you?

00:38:34

JS: There's no staff in the kitchen except me.

00:38:35

SR: Oh really?

00:38:37

JS: It's only one cook. [*Laughs*]

00:38:43

SR: What if you have a bad day and have to stay home?

00:38:45

JS: There's no bad day for me. I always there. *[Laughs]*

00:38:51

SR: All right. Well I know you need to get back to work so thank you for giving me your time.

00:38:53

JS: You're welcome.

00:38:54

SR: Thank you very much.

00:38:55

JS: You're welcome, you're welcome. See you again.

00:38:57

[End Jacqueline Salser Interview]