

JACQUELINE TARD
Bully's Restaurant – Jackson, MS

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Date: April 4, 2014
Location: Bully's Restaurant, Jackson, MS
Interviewer: Mary Beth Lasseter
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 20 minutes
Project: Bully's Restaurant

[Begin Jacqueline Tard Interview]

00:00:03

Mary Beth Lasseter: This is Mary Beth Lasseter from the Southern Foodways Alliance and I'm doing an interview at Bully's Restaurant on Friday, April 4, 2014. Can you please state your name, your birthday, and your occupation?

00:00:18

Jacqueline Tard: My name is Jacqueline Tard. I'm March 12, 1957 and I'm a prep cook and I'm a server and whatever needs to be done, I fall in place and do it.

00:00:31

MBL: Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family.

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JT: Well it's just basically right about now because most of my family has—have passed and it's just basically me and my god-sisters and god-brothers and my little nieces and nephews. And other than that that's it—not a very big family, but a large extended family.

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MBL: How many nieces and nephews do you have?

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JT: A host of them, seven, eight, nine, ten, and twelve at least; yes. And they all—they range from three years old and twenty-one, twenty-five, in college, high school and working on their degrees. Other than that, that's it.

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MBL: So no children of your own?

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JT: No, no, no; I raised enough of them thank you. [*Laughs*] I love kids but no.

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MBL: Tell me about when you started working at Bully's. What brought you here?

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JT: Well it was so close to my house and I needed to be able to go to school, take care of the sick, and get back home. So meanwhile when I got out of school, I went to Murrah; it's close by. And I just came and asked for a job and Mr. Bully gave me one.

00:01:49

MBL: Murrah High School?

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JT: Yes.

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MBL: And Mr. Bully who gave you the job, which Mr. Bully is he?

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JT: The son, Mr. Bully—because the late WB Bully he's deceased. And I worked for them down at the store when they had the store on the corner of Livingston Road before they built this place, so that's how I came in contact with the Bully family. I love all of them.

00:02:16

MBL: Tell me a little bit about the store.

00:02:17

JT: Well there was—we had the best coldest beer in town. And they had a convenience Monday through Saturday and they had a liquor store. And other than that it was just basically helping the community. A lot of people in this area, older people have gone on but we work with people and didn't mind helping people at times would come in and you'd want to get something. Mr. Bully would say go ahead and let them get it because they know when they get paid they going to come back and pay you. Times have changed now.

00:02:45

MBL: So how long was that store open?

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JT: Over 10—15 years, yeah then they sold the store and Mr. Bully and his son had a dream and he wanted to make this place an eating area because across the street was a plant. And it had G&O and other areas around; people needed food to eat. And so that dream came and they built it up themselves along with some of the workers of the Bully's Construction Masonry Company and they've been having soul food ever since. It started out with just hamburgers and smokes and different things but now had to close—they cut that back because the kitchen has got too small because you couldn't have the small food and then the big food too.

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It's a difference when you're making soul food so we had to just cut that out period. Other than that they've been serving everything.

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MBL: And what was the plant across the street that you said had closed?

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JT: It was G&O, Yazoo, and Hood factory. It was several factories right across the street. And 11 o'clock they'd be ready to eat. They'd be ready and they'd come from all—if the train won't catch them they're here or call in and we'll be glad to take care of them. And of course you know those plants are gone now.

00:04:04

MBL: So if the plants closed where are your customers coming from these days?

00:04:08

JT: All over the world, I mean from the Medical Mall, Richland, Ridgeland, all over; we've had people come in from England, Outback Australia Down Under, England. We just had all sorts of people coming in from all over the world. I been just blessed to meet so many different people of all cultures.

00:04:28

MBL: Now what do you do here at the restaurant?

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JT: Well you know what? Whatever—like now you see what I'm doing; whatever needs to be done I have to just fall in place. It's no particular thing that I do. I do whatever needs to be done, even if I have to clean up—whatever needs to be done to get the job done. Other than that I enjoy it. It's a job.

00:04:49

MBL: Tell me a little bit about what you're doing right now. Tell me what you're doing right now.

00:04:52

JT: Well I'm—I'm prepping the collard greens and getting them ready for tomorrow. And I'm cutting them and after I get to cutting these I'm going to put them in soap and wash them and prepare and then you know I'm probably going to do some yams after this but that's what I'm cutting—good old-fashioned collard greens.

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MBL: And I saw you cutting collard greens yesterday. Is this a daily occurrence?

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JT: Every day Monday through Saturday; yes, every day turnips, collards, cabbage, candied yams, rutabagas. We just have to do these things, prep up so in the morning when we come in—everything goes on the stove. Everything has been already washed, prepped, prepared to go.

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MBL: So the food here is home-cooked?

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JT: Definitely; nothing in a can. Everything is hand-picked, everything from the peach cobbler to the greens. Of course you see I'm doing the greens. Nothing is in the can. Everything is home-made, like home-made cornbread. We got a lady in the back in the fry room who does that, but everything is from scratch—it is.

00:05:57

MBL: Now where are you getting this produce?

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JT: We have different people because you know during the—the season some—some crops got destroyed in the storm and some got destroyed with the wintertime. So we have different places. So right—you know just like I said different places, different markets, and we got a guy to like come down from Terry, Mississippi, but I’m telling you a lot of people’s crops got messed up. So we’re blessed to have these.

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MBL: So where are these collards from?

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JT: Right now I believe we got them from the Farmers’ Market; yes.

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MBL: Of all the food you prep and all the food you serve what is your favorite?

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JT: Oh everything, seriously—everything. And I love to taste food when it’s ready. I can tell them if it’s too salty or you need to add a little something but I really like tasting when it’s all prepared; yes.

00:07:00

MBL: Thirty years is a long time to work for one place. So can you tell me what keeps you coming back every day?

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JT: Well number one it's a job. Number two, I—I love the people that I'm surrounded by. Other than that it's just one big happy family. I can say no more, no less. We have our ups and downs but I love my job and I love the surroundings within. Yes; I do.

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MBL: So this restaurant I've heard functions really like a community gathering space.

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JT: Yes.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about that.

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JT: Okay; we have people for instance when the legislators come in, they come, they all meet. We may be small but we make them feel so at home and we just pull this table and we fix it up for them. We have a Pastors Association. We have the Leagues of the National NAACP. We

have just all—coalition of different people come in. And we like to serve—the Visitors Bureau; they send people. So it's just really all around you know.

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MBL: Do they stop in just for casual lunches or do these groups have meetings here?

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JT: Some to eat and some have meetings that when—we don't know but you can tell they're having meetings but they're eating as well and they're socializing and having business. Uh-hm.

00:08:28

MBL: So from the pictures on the walls this place looks like a gathering place where lots of local politics happen?

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JT: Yes; we have had as—we had the late Chokwe—well we've had several of them. We've even had Congressman Benny Thompson, he's been in. We've had the Reverend Jesse Jackson. We've had the Mayor of Fayette back in the day, Charles Evers. We've just had several people of all nationalities from the—. As a matter of fact, he was running—Jesse Jackson was running for President when he came through. So we've had quite a bit of different celebrities.

00:09:04

MBL: Now how do people from out of town hear about you?

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JT: How do they—? Well now we're on the internet and at the time by—by word of mouth and then you have other people who are just finding out. [*Off Mic Conversation with customer. JT: Excuse me.*]

00:09:26

MBL: We'll pause it for a second. [*Pause*] All right; so we're going to continue the interview. Reverend Barry Taylor was just paying his ticket and so Ms. Jackie had to go take care of that, but now we're back; she's back stemming some collard greens. And we—I wanted to talk a little bit about this restaurant as a political gathering place for the community. You were discussing Jesse Jackson and mayoral candidates. Can—is anything happening now with the mayor's race?

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JT: Yes; we have—we—we had Chokwe's son—him and his entourage has been in. It's several ones that been coming in and eating and having meetings and meeting the people. Yes we have and we also have the—another Civil Rights worker who is Miss Pittman, Eva Mae Pittman but she's been involved in every—a lot of political things, but she's working with the Chokwe Lumumba. She's working with his campaign. So right now they're getting ready for it. And we've had Regina King. She's the first lady that's trying to go for the mayor. She's been in here. And that's about it; uh-hm.

00:10:50

MBL: So the candidates even though they're running against each other are all still coming to this restaurant to meet the public?

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JT: Correct. To meet the people and let the people see them out in the community not just doing this time but mostly all the time, not—they just different. I hadn't seen any others, but the ones I called yes, they're meeting the people and letting the people know what they're doing; yes.

00:11:15

MBL: So when I came in here this afternoon there was music when I walked in. Tell me a little bit about the music scene.

00:11:22

JT: Well we've been doing the karaoke. Her name is Jan. She sings at the Marketplace during the week and we've been doing it—it's been going on about two months and we have a good output. People like it and they eat their food, relax and enjoy the music.

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MBL: Is the standard musical guest or do they—do you trade up and what days of the week is it on?

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JT: It's only Fridays only but she's a regular customer. And we didn't know she even was involved with music like that. And she surprised us but she said she's been working at the music—the Marketplace. It's a place where they go and it's just like you go and make greens, fruit, it's just like a Farmers' Market stand and people be walking around. They have different things going on, selling stuff, pottery and different things, art, and she—she—it's like a gallery. But we didn't know she did that until she came. And she's—everybody has been asking for her only on Fridays—Fridays only.

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MBL: Now how late are you open on Fridays?

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JT: From 11:00 to 6:30 Monday through Saturday; closed on Sunday though. We got to go to church.

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MBL: Where do you go to church?

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JT: Mount Sinai Baptist Church on Baily Avenue.

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MBL: Tell me a little bit about her music. What hours is she here and what's her crowd like?

00:12:47

JT: Well she's here various times. Like today she came in at 12:00 and she'll probably leave about 3:30 or 4:00 depending on if she has another engagement. And she has all kinds of music—country western, she does R&B, she does a little bit of religion, you know but it's nothing to make anybody feel like they just have to you know listen to it. It's all sorts of just different good music. Yes; it is.

00:13:14

MBL: Tell me a little bit about some of your customers. Maybe people who aren't famous and on the walls but regulars who come in; who have you met over the years?

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JT: Oh I've met so many people. *[Laughs]* I met so many people. I've just—I've just can't—like Reverend Taylor. I got so many people—with names I just can't—it's just so many people. Some of my old classmates I have not seen in so many years, they come here and other than that you know we got the attorney, Representative Evans comes in. He's a regular. We have Attorney Cooper who is—Melvin Cooper who comes from the Coast. We have several people. I just—I don't want to say every—you know but then somebody will say you didn't think about me—a lot of friends and good customers. Yes; I do.

00:14:12

MBL: Now having been here so many years have you seen customers come in with children?

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JT: Oh yes lots and lots of children but we make them feel at home. It's no problem. And I've seen some have two and three different generations that started and it's—it's just remarkable to see that they remember you and then they'll say I remember you when you was first working here. I say I remember you when you was a baby. *[Laughs]*

00:14:42

MBL: How has this restaurant changed from when you first started working here until now?

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JT: We're more closer and we're more responsible with trying to help everybody although you had your good days and bad but basically we're trying to see what the people really like and we're reaching out and finding out what we need to do to improve but we've gotten much more responsible and we're better. And we're here to stay.

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MBL: Now who all works here? Can you tell me a little bit about the staff?

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JT: Okay; we have like Sandra Robertson right there and then we have Miss Carolyn Cleveland and she's back in the back. We have Anissi and we have Miss Marcia and the young man that's on the cash register, that's Q; and of course Mr. Bully but we all are doing different—different

things. Like the lady that—everybody is just different 'cause some of them I just met see. I've seen them come; I've seen them go but we're one big family. We're trying to be.

00:15:46

MBL: So what are the different roles at the restaurant?

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JT: Well you got someone in the cook—fry room that just basically cornbread and fry whatever needs to be fried and then you have someone like what I'm doing now, I'll do this and whatever needs to be done. Mr. Bully and them prepare whatever needs to be done early in the morning. And whatever needs to be stocked up or whatever we just fall in place and just prepare it. Like now we're preparing for another day. And after that we just do whatever needs to be done to get the job done. When the doors close, everything goes all back over again. We have to start all over, clean up, prep, every—this is all going to be put up in the cooler and we're getting ready for another day.

00:16:29

MBL: So what time does the staff get here in the morning?

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JT: Various times. Mr. Bully gets here about 6 o'clock. Everybody have different times depending on the day of the week but Mr. Bully is a very hardworking person. He'll be here every morning at 6 o'clock.

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MBL: And what about you?

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JT: Various times. Since I have been sick—I'm much better now—but I—I come in like 8:30 and leave until—sometimes I close but just basically just different times.

00:17:00

MBL: And how many staff members are here throughout the day? What's a full staff?

00:17:06

JT: We're going to say maybe six to eight people right and everybody—and then everybody—we have a—a relief crew. Some leave 'cause some come in earlier than others and some stay and help close; uh-hm.

00:17:24

MBL: I'm looking around the restaurant and I'm seeing artwork all over the walls. Can you tell me a little bit about the pictures or the posters?

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JT: Well there's a lot of history. On that wall over there we have everybody who has come to Bully's and have eaten. Some like the late great Johnny Taylor, his son—both have gone; we

have Billy Soul Bonds and we have had several other groups—religious groups that come in and we do what we can for them like the Ken Spirituals, just different people you know. We have like the mass choir people come in and then we also have like the William Brothers, the Ken Spirituals I did say that, the Southern Heirs, so it's just like history. We got late blues singers; you got a little bit of everything.

00:18:17

MBL: Are the portraits on the walls done by local artists?

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JT: Some are and a wonderful—some were done by a police officer and other people. But a police officer and then we got another one with Obama. He's a Mississippi artist and his name is Mr. Savage. He's a—a locally known all over, all over the world, but his name—he has a lot of pictures around as well.

00:18:42

MBL: Is there anything about Bully's that you think sets it apart from other really good soul food restaurants in Jackson? What is special about Bully's?

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JT: They got me. And I love people. I mean I try to go all out. You'd be surprised; I love people and we make you feel at home from the five points—we are the five points because no matter who you are we're going to make you feel—it's no big and no little. Everybody is somebody and

we try to make you feel at home; from those who are able and unable, we're here to help them—make them as comfortable as possible.

00:19:26

MBL: How many more years do you think you'll be here doing collard greens in the afternoon?

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JT: Oh just no telling; I'm just going to take one day at a time. [*Laughs*]

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MBL: Is there anything you want to share with me that I may not have thought to ask?

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JT: You got me. I'm—I'm—I'm—you got me; I enjoyed it and Miss Mary Beth. I enjoyed talking to you.

00:19:52

MBL: Well thank you very much for talking to me today. And I hope you have a good weekend.

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JT: And you do the same as well; thank you.

00:20:00

[End Jacqueline Tard Interview]