

KATHIA DURAN
Cheese Maker- Hammond, LA

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Date: November 11, 2005
Location: Coffee Shop – Metairie, LA
Interviewer: Laura Westbrook, University of New Orleans
Length: 1 hour, 25 minutes
Project: Gulf Coast Foodways Renaissance Project/Hurricane Katrina

[Begin Kathia Duran]

0:00:00.0

Laura Westbrook: It's November 11th and this is an interview with Ms. Kathia Duran at a coffee shop next door to Union Supermarket in Metairie, which sells Kathia's cheeses. The interviewer is Laura Westbrook. Kathia, will you pronounce your name for me?

0:00:05.9

Kathia Duran: Sure; my name is Kathia Duran--Kathia Duran, was Hidalgo.

0:00:12.6

LW: And how long have you lived in this region? How long have you lived near the--?

0:00:18.7

KD: I came to New Orleans 15 years ago. I went to school here to Loyola University and--

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LW: I did too.

0:00:27.4

KD: Yeah; I studied there and then like a lot of us--fall in love with the city and all the little things that they had so then I stayed here and I've been here ever since. I kind of moved out of Orleans Parish and I live in St. Charles Parish but this more community; so I'm still going back and forth--back and forth to--to New Orleans.

0:00:47.0

LW: And what was it like--where did you come from and what was that like making the decision to move here?

0:00:52.9

KD: Well I am from San Jose, Costa Rica and all my family is from there and everybody is there except my mother who I brought about five years ago. And I just--it was one of those love connections--stories in which you meet an American there and you fall in love and we had a long distant relationship and you know finally after dating for a couple--about a year he came back to Costa Rica so we can continue in this long-distant relationship; we're spending a lot of money on--on telephone and he was almost finished with his--his career in--studies at Tulane so he brought me here to study English and you know we got married and--you know I stayed.
[Laughs] I stayed in New Orleans; so that's how I ended up originally in--in New Orleans and I

found a lot of similarities that is--believe it or not but for--it's a lot of Spanish and French influence so you know I've--what shocked me at the beginning quite frankly was the large black American community, which we don't have.

0:02:11.7

KD: Right; so the beginning living in--in Orleans Parish was for me a little bit scary quite frankly because we--we don't know. But then they had a lot of--kind of Spanish, French--the Creoles and the Cajuns and all this various cultures and that's what I kind of felt at home with the red beans and rice on Monday which we eat it every day. And it was funny because that's what we eat every day and here they--they eat it every Monday, so--and the sausage and--and all the--the food and the meals you can--and the family ties and you know it's--it's more the slow pace atmosphere, the easy going; that kind of thing I'm very familiar with--with the Spanish culture. So there was a--for me a connection; it was very--actually very easy to--to meld into--into the culture and you know I stayed and that's--that's one of the difficult things right now after Katrina that for a lot of us who are actually not from here--not born here which we--we kind of adopt the City and love it and everything that it's a time that is so difficult that 50-percent of me says, "Got to get out of here; there's nothing here." I mean there is nothing for you here to offer and a lot of my family and friends that live out of state--that's what they say. Get out of that black hole; that's what they tell me. But another 50-percent of me--is in love with the City and--and--and the morning. I mean the morning every day, the City--what's happening and I just want to be part of the construction and the building and--and having again that sense . . . That's where it--it kind of tears me apart.

0:04:13.8

LW: It is quite a tear.

0:04:14.8

KD: It's tearing me--tearing me apart every day that a lot of me says get out of here; forget about this cheese business. Forget about your life here. And another 50-percent of me says stay with--with my people, with my music, with my culture with--with this thing that is--New Orleans that is very glue(y); I kind of find it very glue(y) and so that--that's the most difficult thing and that's what we started last week making--last week--about two weeks ago we reopened the operation. We started making the cheeses; they--you know there's people placing an order here and there but it's nothing. Right now it's literally nothing for me--for us, so it's almost like--exactly it felt like that way it felt 15 years ago when I came to this City--because you come with a suitcase to a new place and you don't know what you're going to do; you don't know what's your future; you don't have a routine; you just pretty much go day by day. That's exactly how it feels right now as an immigrant.

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LW: Yes; so you're almost living like an immigrant in your own home now?

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KD: Yeah; even though I--I go to uptown and I go to downtown and I've been going around and I know my way around and I know the people here and it's just like--it's--it's just like they--I live day by day with a lot of uncertainty. It's--so that's the reality right now.

0:05:58.3

LW: Yeah; you mentioned how--how easy it was--or how--how the culture here made it easier for you to make a transition to living here. Are there Hispanic traditions that you brought with you or--or did--were you able to connect with the community here and continue to carry on some of the traditions? You mentioned food traditions; were there other ones that--like certain kinds of celebrations, or . . . ?

0:06:27.4

KD: Well if--if you think about it a lot of that culture--traditions all around the world goes around food. Food is the center attention--is the table, is what you eat what makes people to connect. And the first five, six years because I was going to a university and I was--I did not speak English; I pretty much was with Americans. I was kind of avoiding my own culture and trying to merge--and trying to transfer myself to the new culture but after I kind of simulate and understood--I kind of went back to my own people, so it's--it's just like you play a game and--and you know lately the past years what I do--I attend a Spanish-speaking church and I did that on

purpose even though I can go to American--English-speaking church I go to a Spanish-speaking church because there's not just the Gospel that you're going to; you go for the social, so they do--they do you know lots of events, lots of cultural events about Hispanic--not just my own country because we have very few--very few Costa Ricans in--in New Orleans. But about you know the food and the music and, you know, the Independence Day--we celebrate Independence Day and we celebrate in outfits how--how we dress up--

0:08:10.8

LW: Yes; the traditional?

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KD: Yes, but it's always around about food and music and it's funny because every--every culture that you go it's about food and music--food and music. So I do other things around my church--.

0:08:27.4

LW: And which church is that?

0:08:28.6

KD: It's--it's called The Good Shepherd in Metairie. The Good Shepherd Baptist Church, that's where I go.

0:08:40.2

LW: And where--where is--because I know there are a couple of "Good Shepherd"s?

0:08:44.2

KD: This one is on--almost on Transcontinental--the--the street is not Transcontinental; I don't remember the name of the--the street but it's--

0:08:54.5

LW: It's a corner though?

0:08:55.1

KD: It's between West Napoleon and Veterans on Transcontinental, almost under the bridge.

0:09:02.5

LW: And they always have beautiful flowers out near it?

0:09:06.0

KD: No, no; it's not that one.

0:09:08.0

LW: Okay; I'll drive by and look.

0:09:09.0

KD: Yeah; yes, I don't have the--the address.

0:09:14.3

LW: Oh it's--I can find it.

0:09:16.2

KD: But I will give you the address later--later but and then they--I was more involved with the economic development--I mean I used to be more involved with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the--the city of Kenner has a lot of cultural activities because the majority of people--Hispanic people live in Kenner, so they have all these cultural events.

0:09:39.9

LW: They do; it's wonderful.

0:09:42.2

KD: Then you know—they have the--the different--the Catholics, the arch . . . ?

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LW: The archdiocese?

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KD: Archdiocese has its activities, so you know you always go and--and participate or do things just because--that's how you get the good food; that's where you get the good music and they could bring the concerts and the, you know, so that's the only way to--to get connected and--.

0:10:18.0

LW: Speaking of the good food, how did you get started in the cheese business?

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KD: Well--well first of all my family--my mother's side is from a place called Cartago.

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LW: How is that spelled?

0:10:36.9

KD: It's spelled C-a-r-t-a-g-o and that's--

0:10:47.2

LW: And that's in Costa Rica?

0:10:48.0

KD: That's in Costa Rica; they--that's the mountains and they grow--they're in the dairy--it's all dairy and cows and so a lot of farming--my distant family--when I used to grow up and I used to go to the countryside to see my grandmother. You know, you go down the street to drink coffee with a neighbor and the lady was in the back making cheese. But--and it was very common; it was very common as a way of making--making the cheese because when you were making the cheese you can't stop until you've finished. And I--I just remember it was very, very common--

pretty much all the houses one way or the other with so much access of milk that they had the sour cream and they had--they had the different kind of cheeses, and so I always grew up with the sense of--that they made their own bread and they made their own cheese; they--they grow their own vegetables because my family from my mother's side is still [doing this] today--they--they do a lot of agri-business. They even grow--they have coffee plantations; a lot of them have potato plantations; they have plantings and they grow also sugar--sugar cane and--and let me see what else they grow that I remember--and of course it's a given--it's a given for them to have cows. So it's just part of the scenery; I mean it's--it's so--so I think I always had that on me.

0:12:40.7

LW: Did you learn as a child?

0:12:42.1

KD: No; actually I learned it a year ago. I finally--it's one of the things--it's one of the things that you grow seeing the countryside and as you get older and none of my family went to college, okay. So as you grow older you want to pull away from that and you hate it because you want to pull away from all those things because you--you just want to become a city girl. You want to--it's one of those things that--that they make in movies today; you hate it and you don't want to do that anymore and you don't want to know and you are embarrassed and so you know even though I grew up in the city, every weekend, every Saturday my parents--since I was little, they took me to the countryside with a lot of the rest of my family you know and we used to go

fishing to the rivers and--and we used to go and pick berries and they had a lot of different kinds of strawberries and berries. So but--as you grow older you didn't want to deal with that anymore. You just--that's not cool, okay; you--you want to go--you have another mentality so it's one of the things where I grew up and I went to college there and then that's what I--or reasons I--I came to New Orleans because you know I fall in love with--with this American boy that used to live there and it happens that he--he came back to New Orleans to study at Tulane University and he said come with--come along with me and I thought that--that was a big opportunity when I was going to leave along with him and that's something that you do--you don't do that any--in your country--in my country; you don't--you don't--

0:14:33.6

LW: A very romantic story?

0:14:34.4

KD: Yeah; you don't live together with a boy in those days.

0:14:39.1

LW: And so far away.

0:14:40.7

KD: And so far away; it was--it was an adventure for me. I couldn't hardly get away from the countryside, the city--the everything. It was a new adventure for me and that's how I--I moved from you know Costa Rica to--to New Orleans but I know that I--you know deep inside of me you carry all those things that your grandmother taught you. I mean when I was growing up I saw my grandmother get up in the morning and she made tortillas and I remember she--she had-- I mean it's amazing and now I treasure that--that I do it, even though I can go next door and buy the tortillas, I do it in her memory.

0:15:29.4

LW: Yes.

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KD: Okay; so it's something that it glues to you when I was growing up. She--she got out--it was a given; it's almost like brushing your teeth. You make your bread and your tortillas--period. And she used to go to the back when she had the chickens; she pulled their--their eggs and she started making her bread and she said what she was going to cook for breakfast. We'd eat tortillas for breakfast with--with the beans and boom--boom, I mean--I mean she did 12, 13, 14 [*Gestures*] and she cooked them and I mean like in a flash. And I grew up seeing that--making the bread and making the--going to the back and pull the--the cilantro and the--and the peppers

because everybody had--not everybody but everybody living in big areas where there's a lot of ground, so they grow their own little vegetable garden.

0:16:24.3

LW: Right; and keep their own chickens and--?

0:16:28.1

KD: So they have a little--five--ten chickens and when I was little they--I had my own little chicken thing when my rabbit and my duck in--in--.

0:16:39.6

LW: So they had an area set aside for you?

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KD: Some for me because every morning traditionally they gave me that responsibility in which I--I used to go to--to--to--there was an elementary school where a girl used to--I need to go and feed the chickens and make sure everything with them and then you can go to school. So there was kind of the responsibility that they gave you and I had my little rabbit here and a little duck here and my little parrot here.

0:17:07.4

LW: Uh-huh; did that make you feel important when you were small?

0:17:10.6

KD: It was--it was--it was so--so cool, but now when you get 18—20, that is like, you don't even mention that because that's so embarrassing, okay. But these days I--I am so proud that they taught me this. And because a lot of people these days think that believe it or not when I started making a cheese a year ago and I said I'm going to take my time, I'm going to go to my country back again; I have to--I have to stay two or three months--I'm going to take a loan if I have to do it and go into the woods and these people are going to taught me how to make the cheese. That traditional cheese--and that's how I made myself--the only things are I'm--I'm being lately in the past three--four years, every time I go I said to myself, "Okay, I need to learn how to do bread," so I go to the lady who is right about 90 years old who lived down the street who is just like almost ready to die and I said, "You still making bread? Yeah, honey; you're still make--taught me. I don't want this to die. Okay; and the last time right now because of the hurricane I went to Costa Rica. I evacuate to Jackson to--Pittsburgh, Mississippi and then from there I went to Costa Rica for--for two weeks and so that--you know I--I did--that's one of the things I did you know.

0:18:40.3

LW: Yes; you used that time--?

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KD: Yeah; I used the time to reconnect with my past, with--with--with those little traditions-- little, little stabilities but they're important. They're--they're important; they're a part of me that-- and--and when I go and talk to all the Hispanic people at church and everything they remember the same things I remember but they're like discarding them. They're not part of that. Right now everything is supermarket. They think that the milk comes from bottles. I said, "No; milk comes from cows." This is a different thing; I mean believe it or not a lot of kids these days--trust me; that's the first thing I learned. A lot of kids just think--think the milk comes from I don't know where. They don't even--they don't even connect that--that cheese and the milk and vegetables, they--they just didn't farm and that it's animals that provide and it's hard-working people-- especially the hard-working people doing the first step to raising those animals, to--to treating the land to--to grow those vegetables. So I have a lot of appreciation when I went back to them to the Crescent City [Farmers' Market] and saw all those farmers. I saw my grandfather--I say my grandmother it's just that they would do it--well they did for business; the coffee plantation was a business and the planting--the plantation was a business, but the chickens and the cheese it was just for you to make and you give it to your neighbors and they exchange. They exchange things you know; some of them have you know pigs which is very difficult to raise because they're real dirty, so they exchange meat and they--they do--so you know it was other days and other areas and these areas--it still had you know--you go across the river and moving and go down you can see cows and--and--.

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LW: Now, what is the process that you use for--let me let you take a sip of your coffee, but -- what process do you use for making your cheese and how is the cheese that you learned to make different from, say, French cheese or Swiss cheese or--?

0:21:07.1

KD: Okay; first of all the cheese--the cheese--there is two kinds of cheeses. I mean we're putting in the big broad of cheeses; the ones that they age and the Europeans does the--does the--the ones that they--they do. They--they make the cheese and they--they age the cheese for months. Then it's the fresh cheese; it's the one that you eat within a week the following day--within two weeks, it's fresh. It's eaten right away after you eat it. So that the Hispanics from Mexico or Guatemala, they are more used to eating--or they make--they eat fresh cheeses, what they call unripe cheeses okay. So it's much more easy in terms because you--you--you don't have to go through the process to set up a cave or--or a storage facility; you have to have it a specific temperature, you have to have specific humidity, light; it's like when you make wine--it's the same process. So you have to keep the--the cheeses there for a certain period of time so not all regions are--and the milk also is--is good for that, so our cheeses are pretty much fresh. When it's a lot of milk they salt cheese; it's a very salty cheese. And give me a second because I've got to--
[Coughs]. I still have this cough--it's called a Cough Katrina--Katrina Cough.

0:22:55.4

LW: Yes; it's the--the dust really gets in your throat and in your lungs.

0:22:59.0

KD: It tickles--it tickles here and when it started--I mean you--you just can't stop.

0:23:08.8

LW: Well do you think that though the reason that it's--I eat a lot of cheese, but I don't know a lot about the process of making it. Is it that the--it seems like maybe the places that don't age the cheese for a long time are places where it's pretty hot. I mean it would be hard to age cheese properly here, say outdoors or--?

0:23:34.1

KD: Well no; you can't do it outdoors--definitely, especially in this weather.

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LW: No; it's just way too hot.

0:23:40.3

KD: Obviously it's way too hot but--well basically traditionally Hispanics eat fresh cheeses, okay number one. In other words, we don't--we don't age them to be able to eat them. Secondly unlike--well the South it's very--the North, I say Wisconsin there is artisan--artisan cheeses everywhere; okay everybody has artisan cheeses. Here in the South it's not a tradition; it's not a--it's not like making--everybody knows how to make gumbo or they know how to fish or deal with seafood, but they can--no clue in terms of cheeses because it's not part of their background. It's just not part of the--so they just don't know.

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LW: Have you found that people have been very excited about having somebody here who makes fresh cheeses?

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KD: They like our—like, “Say what?” If I mention it or something and they--they have a lot of background about me, right before Katrina—I evacuated on Sunday; that same week, I remember it was Monday--Tuesday, I was invited by the Department of Agriculture--they--they have a bulletin and they had--and the Department of Marketing--under the Department of Marketing, they brought this bulletin board about an agriculture--emerging agriculture businesses, like honey and like the seafood industry, and they run articles about those industries.

Well right before Katrina I was invited by them and I went to their facilities in Baton Rouge and I gave them a three-hour demonstration of how to make cheese, because cheese-making takes a long time. It can take about five--seven hours, not because you're doing the cheese. It's just, not that much labor intensive, it's just that you take--let's say this is the milk and you take the milk and you culture the milk with bacteria. It's actually good bacteria and then you leave it there okay; you leave it there for one--two hours and you leave the milk to do their magic, okay. So--and then you come back and you--and you add another component and you steer it and you--you--you make sure that it's--it's not contaminated and you leave. So it's the process in which it's--it's a product that developed within seven hours--.

0:26:35.1

LW: Seven.

0:26:35.8

KD: Yeah; seven hours--just by leaving it there, okay. Once it's--it's ready okay, so there's when you take you--you take you maybe an hour to process it, which is taking the curd which is like--like custard--

0:26:54.8

LW: Cottage cheese?

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KD: No; like seeing cottage cheese or like seeing--like seeing gel, you know you make gel, that you know it wiggles, okay; so you take the wiggles, you take the sour cream and you start extracting the--the water and that's how you make the solid piece of cheese. So they took pictures or a videotape--I don't remember--and they did the whole thing. I brought the milk already--it's like a full process of the making cheese.

0:27:30.9

LW: Like a how-to video, like an instructional--?

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KD: Yeah; a how-to video so from the moment that the milk was--was cultured, we went through the process and she took the--the whole process from the end to the beginning and I brought already the--the pieces of cheeses, the final product and we ate it and they invited the whole department and we ate the--the cheese. So she has all the pictures and--and she called me about two weeks ago and she said well we have not done anything; are you still going to be in business? What's the deal? So we--we started; I mean we--we've been making cheese here and there for--for business and--and I said, "Well we don't know." "If you know this is going to--we would have to be interviewed to add this story after Katrina and see how you were affected--this

and that.” I said, “Okay.” But they--they have--you know I spent a whole afternoon with them and they did lots--lots of pictures on the whole process you know from pouring the milk and the curd and filtering the--the--the cheese, so it was--for them which is the Department of Agriculture, it was the first time seeing how to make cheese. I said, “Come on.”

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LW: That really says something, doesn't it?

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KD: You are the Department of Agriculture in Louisiana and this is the first time you--you had no clue? They said no; we have seen everything--how to do--how to peel their alligator and make the meat, how to make turtle soup and we have not--never seen somebody make a cheese around here. So they were--they were amazed to see that--that was possible. I said of course; I said as long as you have milk you can make cheese; it's just that this is an industry that they don't have the know-how. Another issue that I learned during this time was that when you talk about dairy, the only--they--you think about this huge [*Emphasis Added*] plant with all the--all the blowers and whizzers and the--

0:29:56.1

LW: And the cows and the big milking machines?

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KD: Yeah; so the perception of the dairy business is--is that it's--it's very--it's high-tech and it's huge, so they don't--they don't perceive the industry as an artisan as you making--I don't know--it's--what is something here that the people from here they're only involved in the seafood business. They go, they have a little boat and they go and they pick up some shrimp, they put up a little--a little store in the corner and they sell the shrimp and the crabs and they boil it and they--they do different things and they sell the--the seafood and that a certain agribusiness because the people know how to do it--they really do a mom and pop and a lot of--a lot--most of the things here are mom and pop businesses that they--they know how to do it and they develop it and they--these people survive but they have no clue when it talks about dairy because they--they just have in their mind this huge manufacturer you know and that's not true--that's not true.

0:31:13.8

LW: You know speaking of--where do you get--where does your milk come from? Do you have an arrangement with a local dairy?

0:31:20.1

KD: Yeah; well before Katrina I had an arrangement with--with Dairy Fresh, with--with a couple ones, with all the players in town because I cannot--the milk goes in price up and down

and supply ranges and--and the price of the milk if it's not right my price is not going to be right. Another thing is the quality; if the--if the cows don't eat well, okay the milk is going to be just water, and it's funny because when you go eat--when you go and buy milk at the store, milk is milk. You don't--you don't--it's not like eating an apple--that you see the apple and say this is a good apple because it's--it's--it looks good and it's not good or--you--you cannot by just looking at it--can see if it's a good one or a bad one. When you go and buy milk you don't see the difference; you--you just drink it and--and I have never heard anybody say, "Oh they're not having a good milk this week." Milk is milk, but when you make cheese that's a different story because it's the essence. It's the essence of milk, so when it's--when the milk is not good meaning that maybe the grass and--or maybe the cow is not well-fed what you're buying is pretty much water. And how I know? Because when I process the milk okay and I end up with this little teeny tiny chunk of cheese and I say what happened? There was supposed to be three--three times the amount of cheese. It's not that they added water, no. It's just that the--the cow when he eats--don't have enough good things, so all she has is water.

0:33:29.2

LW: Right; so if she doesn't get the proper nutrition--?

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KD: When she--when they milk it you know when she's--when she's--they're pulling out just the water; it's just liquid. She doesn't have juice--really protein in there, so that's how I find out that--

uh-oh. So I--I kind of play with all the people and see because--I made this week cheese and I see there is not--I'm not making a good gel, so I--I'm not blaming that they're putting water on it. It's just like something is going on with their cows, so let me switch to this other one and I played with the prices too, because these people will fight for one or two pennies. We fight for one or two pennies per gallon. It's very price-sensitive; so--so I had--I had it so hard because--as a matter of fact I called yesterday one of my suppliers and they're not answering the phone. So right now after this interview I'm going to--I know where the wife used to work and I'm going to go there and see--are you guys--what? So I used to deal with Dairy Fresh, with what's the other--Brown's, and then—and Kleinpeter's. So right now what I'm doing is we just go straight to Sam's and buy the milk which is--their milk is really good by the way but it's not the right price. So we have to start all over again with--we just started to have a good relationship with Kleinpeter's, so we kind of are going to have to do--but there is not enough business. I mean we'll--how many gallons, look how many--how much milk you're talking about? If it's not that much they're not going to pay attention to me, so right now it's again--are these--?

0:35:33.1

LW: You have to rebuild those relationships?

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KD: No; rebuild the demands of--of--it's--I mean we had a lot of businesses in downtown New Orleans--all that is gone.

0:35:46.7

LW: Yes; what happened in--before Katrina; what were the outlets that--where were you able to sell your cheeses?

0:35:57.5

KD: Well we had--we had some independent stores, gourmet stores in downtown in the French Quarter. Then we had supermarkets like Dorignac's okay; we--and then for the first time and then the Hispanic store—this one next door [Union Supermarket in Jefferson Parish]. We had all the Hispanic stores which Hispanics eat a super amount of cheese; it's unbelievable. They eat cheese for breakfast, for lunch, and for dinner. I mean their consumption of cheese is--is quite large. While Americans--you guys eat cheese like with crackers and wine; it's just like a little thing. No; we--the cheese is protein, so we incorporate the protein--the way you eat your egg. I mean during the morning you eat your egg because it's--it's a source of protein and you feel--it fills you up and it's--it's filling. Well we add the cheese on it, the chunk of cheese and--and for lunch we do it too and for dinner, we put it on top of the--even in the--you see all Mexican dishes; all Mexican dishes have cheese on them, okay. So that consumption of cheese is large, so--but unfortunately to sell like next door it's--I have to sell it to almost 30-percent of less than to Americans because that--the market, the Hispanic market will not bear--will not pay eight dollars a pound. They will pay five-fifty for some of my cheese--the most expensive one.

0:37:48.1

LW: So they buy more cheese but not going to pay as much?

0:37:52.4

KD: Exactly so.

0:37:53.9

LW: Probably because they buy--it's such a regular thing.

0:37:56.7

KD: Well, I'm going to tell you another issue here. The issue here is the cheese, the Hispanic cheeses like Queso Fresco, Queso Blanco--all these cheese that you saw here, okay--let's see; this one, the Queso Fresco, Ranchero, Blanco, Queso Dijon which is the mozzarella--all those cheeses today are imported. So if you eat Italian wine and French cheese--well those cheeses are imported from Costa Rica and from Guatemala and from Mexico and they are imported at such--such low prices, I mean one dollar a pound—one dollar a pound, so it's for me and a for a lot of businesses in the South that wants to compete with the imported cheese from Central America is almost impossible because in Central America, well they just import it very, very, very cheap.

0:39:02.7

LW: They're produced very inexpensively and they're--they're imported--?

0:39:06.4

KD: The labor--the labor is nothing; it's twenty cents an hour; the milk also is relatively available, so basically it's--it's products that are imported these days at such a low price, not only remember--remember what's happening with the shrimp from China?

0:39:33.4

LW: Yes.

0:39:33.6

KD: That the shrimp business here; they were doing their own thing and they had a set price. Suddenly there were all these shrimp and these seafood products coming from China--Thailand at two-fifty a pound, three dollars a pound; I mean they were like super-low price and the people, you were saying it's--it's impossible. I mean how these people--I mean it's China. China is on the other side of the world; it's literally impossible that an--they have to travel, it's on the other side of the world, I mean how can possible a pound of--of shrimp can cost you know sixty percent less, sixty percent less than that--than one would do here? So it's shocking; but you know that's

the reality of--of internationalization. I mean there's other issues that they don't have there; there's no unions and there's all the other things and so--similarly it's happening with the cheese. So that's--however, so it's easy for me, so to speak, to put it on the American market with the Italian cheeses, with the fresh cheeses--

0:40:44.4

LW: Right; where people are going to be accustomed to paying for it?

0:40:45.4

KD: With the gourmet cheeses--yeah; because they're paying eight dollars a pound, seven dollars a pound with cheese, but they don't eat as much. They eat very, very little, so that's--.

0:40:56.0

LW: Now--so you've told me a little bit about the challenges now, post-Katrina, of getting your supplies. How about the places that you supply? I mean obviously Dorignac's is open now, but what about the restaurants?

0:41:14.2

KD: I don't know; it's my answer.

0:41:17.2

LW: So you're just waiting to see?

0:41:17.8

0:41:35.4

KD: I can buy a gallon of milk wholesale price at--see--at two-fifty, okay. In New York when--and in Texas they buy it for less than one dollar. Okay; so you can--all the process and the sales price, the distribution price, the retail price, when it comes here I start with--with two-fifty and they start with seventy-five cents. Even the transportation costs you know and all the different layers on that supply chain I have a big disadvantage and then you will say, "Well, that's why; maybe there is not the cheese manufacturers around here." I think the reason is because there is no knowledge on how to--it's traditionally by region all around the world they know how to do certain things, okay, and they have passed that tradition and the knowledge from generation to really that's how they learn to do it. I just came back from Turkey not a long time ago and there it's been making these beautiful carpets and you--you are amazed and they have taught since ages how to make those carpets and they just--that's how they know how--that's their industry and for Napoli--when I was in Napoli, they know how to make the pizza you know and they just know how to do that. Similar thing, I think here the same thing is it's not just the supply of milk; it's just that they don't know how. But if you were asking about the challenges, the challenge is

going to be the stores. There is not going to be enough stores and enough demand. The--the good thing is that Christmas is coming, Thanksgiving is coming and the--everybody during those days have a lot of parties and they're looking for--for the kind of snacks.

0:43:52.5

LW: Something special.

0:43:53.9

KD: Another thing that I think is going to be positive is the--the people from Louisiana tend to support Louisiana-made products. They're very loyal to support local industries, local commerce, so I think that this mindset that we're going through more--they're going to try to support more but it's--it's a matter of putting--putting the product in front of the customers if there is not--it is not a place to put it, okay. So I think it's going to be the true challenge right now that it's going to be slow because people right now--I'm not even going to dare to go to my distributor because my distributor is going to be very cautious because nobody wants to spend money in investment if they don't know tomorrow they're going to hit the road and go to someplace else.

0:44:58.5

LW: Have any of the restaurants called you?

0:44:59.9

KD: No, we--we were not dealing with restaurants. We were dealing just retail because the restaurants had a little--we were--right--right before Katrina I was working with the Crescent City Farmers Market in promoting the cheeses at the restaurant level. We were trying--we were dealing only with the retail business because it's the easy one. You just bring the cheese, they buy the cheese and that's it. We actually did not know and that's why we were working with the Crescent City Farmers Market on how to sell to the restaurants, how to sell to the chef; we participated in August at the Food Service Expo from the Louisiana Restaurant Association. They had this huge food service expo at the Convention Center. It was amazing you know--all the big players were there and all the food distributors and chefs all over the region were there, so we had a--we kind of introduced ourselves and we kind of showed our weakest you know point and--and how to sell to the chef, which is a little bit different because they're actually cooking with the products; it's not just eating it, but they are actually cooking with the product. But all that went away, too; I mean we have all these huge amounts of business cards, probably of restaurants and--and businesses that they just don't exist today. They are not--they're not in business today, so you know like everybody else, everybody is like in the limbo trying to see okay; which was to go now. So that's--that's how we're standing. I mean that's the reality.

0:47:12.7

LW: Yeah; what was--what was your experience with the storm? When did you hear that it was coming our way and what plans did you make?

0:47:22.9

KD: Well--personally?

0:47:25.0

LW: Uh-hm.

0:47:25.7

KD: Well I take storms very seriously all these fifteen years and I had evacuated about six times seriously and when I evacuate and after this post-Katrina, a lot of people say well we live--but we didn't know that we were going to lose our house and now we don't have no pictures of the family or the videotapes. I said when you leave your house and you evacuate it's because your life is in danger. That means that what you're leaving behind is gone, too. So the past hurricanes--I'm a weather girl--I mean, I was watching the TV and I said this one, the previous one, you know I was kind of watching and I said, "This one is not going to hit; this one is going to go this way," you know. You kind of have to use common sense. When I saw Katrina on--on Thursday I called my friend and I said, "This one--this one is going to hit us. This--this is it; so pack your bag, take whatever you don't want to lose, your personal belongings, your pictures, your videos--things that you cannot replace and get--and hit the road." She goes, "Are you sure--?" I said, "Trust me." I said this time--I mean it--it--you don't have to go for why people say; just watch

the--the weather guy. This--this thing is coming right through us. The water is going to come up. It's not going to be--so we--we actually evacuated on Sunday and quite frankly when I left my house I remember turning back and I went to every single room and trust me--in my case, I said okay, I'm--I'm going to lose all this. I was--I faced the reality and it's amazing that a lot of people who live--are from here--did not have the sense; they were going on vacation for a couple days. They didn't have--really had a sense that they were going to lose the things. They had just said oh we're going to evacuate. We're going to have vacation for three days and then we're going to come back; so they left everything there. They did not move everything. In my case, I moved everything to high level, you know thinking that the water was going to come three, four feet and I packed my car with the things I did not want to lose--my pictures, my pictures--video, you know mostly paper, you know mostly documents that I was going to need them. The rest I left--you know; but I went to every single room and I said to my mom, "Take what you want, what--the things that are close to your heart," and when I came back a lot of my friends that lost their houses said well we--we left everything on the floor. We--we thought that nothing was going to happen. So why you left in the first place? It--it made no sense, but it's--so it was--it was--it was bad. I mean we--I mean evacuated like everybody else--eight hours on the road just to be in Mississippi. We slept on the floor for eight days in the Baptist Church, no light for three days, eating--making a line to you know just to eat; the Red Cross feed us for a week and afterward we find that we were able to travel from Jackson, Mississippi to Costa Rica because we don't have family that will take us, you know. So--so we were very fortunate when we came back. The--you know the area that we picked to live was not flooded but, I cannot say that with my friends, but I always remembered that big story about the wolf and they said the wolf is coming, the wolf is

coming, and--and it was always a joke, and when the wolf came the--the shepherd said, "Ah, nothing is going to happen," and they eat all the--. Do you remember that, the story?

0:51:36.8

LW: Yes; the boy who cried wolf? I think it's very much like that because there was a storm the week before and people had been told to evacuate and it didn't come, and so people were--

0:51:49.9

KD: People were not taking it seriously and they were leaving their houses and leaving everything like--like not thinking. I mean it's tragedy, the--the deal about the refrigerators--hello. Even myself--well when I left I turned all the--all the lights--all the switches and the only thing that I left on was the refrigerators and then said this--this--there's not going to be light so the refrigerators are going to stink, so I kind of took things out but why--I mean these--these things about the refrigerators-- this is going to be a huge environmental issue with all these big refrigerators and--and the City, the Government they're not telling us, "Hey if you're leaving, please clean your refrigerators because it's not going to be power light." I mean we're idiots.

0:52:47.6

LW: No one thought to mention--.

0:52:52.4

KD: They--they tell us--take a flashlight, water, and canned foods and a radio--I remember and the--and the map, like I don't know my way around, then they give you a map--then give you a map, I mean that's such basic things but they don't tell us hey you guys are not going to have power now for four days; clean your refrigerator. That was a major--I mean there are refrigerators everywhere. I mean we were not--we were not--we were not prepared at all; that's the bottom line. The city was not prepared, the State was not prepared and we were not prepared and we did not use common sense. That's--we are idiots because we did not use common sense that things like well if we're not going to have power now for three days--even three days, our food in the refrigerator is going to go bad--just take it out. And--and now you see all these--these--all this trash, so things--things like that.

0:54:00.4

LW: What--what would your hope be for--obviously the refrigerators have to go somewhere and the--I heard this morning that there are corporations all over the United States that are offering to take some of those things away and either recycle them--

0:54:19.1

KD: Really?

0:54:19.7

LW: --or use them for their own purposes, break them into components and--I'm not sure what they want to do with them. So if we're smart, we'll figure out how to take them up on that offer and let them take these things away. That was just in the news this morning. Obviously we need to clean up but, otherwise, you're very attached to Orleans Parish. What would you--what would you like to see change? What would you like to see when we were talking about being part of the rebuilding and kind of having a voice in helping develop--?

0:54:56.8

KD: I think that people of--well you--we talk about different parishes here; okay we're talking Orlean Parish, we talk--we talk about Jefferson Parish and we talk about the parish where I live; we live in St. Charles Parish. The only difference--we are not bad--in a bad situation because the--the hurricane did not hit St. Charles Parish.

0:55:17.7

LW: Right.

0:55:20.2

KD: But I think we--we are not prepared. I mean we--they did not have the knowledge to prepare themselves and prepare the community. And--and so I don't know--are you talking about Orleans Parish which I don't have a voice; I don't live there; I don't pay the taxes there.

0:55:42.8

LW: You do business there though.

0:55:44.3

KD: Well I do business there but--I mean it counts but it doesn't count, but basically there has been a lot of procrastination in the government part; they have not done anything and they tend to stay and not do anything and that's--this is the result.

0:56:07.0

LW: Yeah; now did you deal with any Government agencies or relief agencies? You said that you stayed in a church when you evacuated.

0:56:17.6

KD: Yeah; we--you took it on personally right? Yeah; when we evacuate we were fortunate enough to end up in Pittsburgh, Mississippi. It was 2 o'clock in the morning; we were already--

drove eight hours like everybody else. We were--we didn't have a place to sleep and they had five Baptist churches and these churches--that's where I plan to spend my Thanksgiving Day because I plan to drive there and give thanks to all those people. They gave me food; they gave me clothes; they gave me money for--the church, not the Red Cross; it was the church.

0:56:59.3

LW: It sounds as though you got to know the individuals there...

0:57:00.0

KD: The individuals there during eight days that I stayed there, they came, they entertained us, they feed us, they--they give us blankets, they gave us clothes, they gave us rides because I did not have a car because I was driving with my friend; they took us to the supermarket or the pharmacy--everything--everything and then--

0:57:29.3

LW: Were there other families there as well?

0:57:32.0

KD: We were two hundred people in that shelter from all backgrounds.

0:57:36.8

LW: Now how did you find out about--

0:57:36.3

KD: ...There were Muslims.

0:57:38.2

LW: --the shelter? How did you end up there?

0:57:38.9

KD: We--we were desperate and it was two o'clock in the morning and I had two elderly people in my car--

0:57:45.0

LW: And were they neighbors or family?

0:57:46.3

KD: Family—family, and we were desperate; we were knocking on every single hotel like everybody else and at 2 o'clock in the morning I mean this guy from maintenance came and said ma'am you look pretty desperate. I said I don't have a place to sleep; I have to--I mean I don't know what to do. He said don't worry; I'm going to take you to a Baptist Church where they are opening and you can sleep on the floor. And that's how we ended--I mean this--this guy kind of guided us in the car where about the Baptist church was--.

0:58:18.8

LW: And he worked at the hotel that you were trying to get into?

0:58:20.4

KD: He worked--exactly; he worked in the hotel and they were posting signs you know--you need a place to sleep there is places; people were everywhere. People were on the street; well I think you were in the same--a lot of people were in the same situation and--and we stayed there for eight days and the Red Cross was there and--and they organized like any other shelter and you know--so it was--it was--it was hard--it was hard; that was something shocking you know from being in your house and that--we stayed there eight days because we couldn't get out. We could not get out.

0:59:00.9

LW: Now who was with you?

0:59:03.2

KD: My mother and a friend of mine and her mother, so it was two elderly women and my friend and I, so we were four women in--in the car and you know that's how we--that's how we figured it out you know. You--you make the best of--but--

0:59:30.5

LW: And then when you left how did you—were you able to arrange a flight to Costa Rica? Did your husband go with you?

0:59:36.4

KD: No, no; I'm not married. Well; I'm not married anymore.

0:59:41.5

LW: So you went on your own?

0:59:43.2

KD: Yeah.

0:59:43.7

LW: Did your mom go with you?

0:59:43.9

KD: Yes; because my mom--

0:59:44.4

LW: You and your mother?

0:59:45.9

KD: My mom got kind of sick and the other lady got sick, too. You know they're--one is eighty, almost ninety, and my mom is not really elderly, but she's almost seventy, but we were sleeping on the floor. It was not a pleasant situation so I said I need to get my mother out of here and I did not have family, so I said, "Well we need to go back home. I mean we need to go back to Costa Rica and stay there until this clears up."

1:00:13.4

LW: How did your mom respond to that?

1:00:15.3

KD: So you know my mom was like, "Well what's going on?" I mean she--she couldn't figure it out what's--really what's going on. They were kind of disoriented--very disoriented.

1:00:29.6

LW: Yes; did going back to Costa Rica help to, kind of, ground her?

1:00:36.6

KD: Yeah; it kind of--you know I told her we're going to take a vacation to Costa Rica, so we went to Costa Rica and she kind of--she was on vacation and she was ready to come back and she said I want to come back home. I said well home is not exactly the way it used to be.

1:00:57.4

LW: And what was it like when you got home?

1:01:00.4

KD: Very depressing is the word--

1:01:03.6

LW: Really? Even in your neighborhood?

1:01:06.3

KD: The word is “depressing,” because you don't live isolated--even if your house is okay; you don't live on an island. Maybe your house is there but if all your surroundings are in bad shape; it's going to affect you. I mean you don't live--it's not just you; you're a part of a system. You're a part of a community and if your community, your city is all mashed out with trash and the--the businesses that were there--they're *not* anymore. It makes a real impact on you, and then you see the news...

1:01:47.2

LW: Yeah.

1:01:49.3

KD: And you--I like to see the news because it's--it's informative. It kind of makes you see what--makes you--make better decisions for yourself based on what they're telling you but they're very depressing, even so. Even rebuilding New Orleans. The "Spirit of Louisiana," and all that kind of stuff; I mean you can tell they—they're trying to cheer you up, but the bottom line is that when you go out and you go to the shopping center where you used to go and there's no--there is no shopping center and you see trash everywhere and you see your government as a fool because they were--it really is a turn-off, so you came back but you're like a loser; that's how I felt. It's just like a depressing loser in your life. I mean I just wonder if all the cities like Miami, they have always been hit by hurricanes; like Houston--do they go through this? I just wonder do they? Is it because we're not there, and generally we're not watching the news there, but I just wonder are they going through this--because it's not just me. I mean when I talk to people in my church and I mean are you feeling what I'm feeling, which is not a really optimistic feeling? Yeah; well yeah we need to take that whole--the bull by the horns I mean and--but--.

1:03:29.6

LW: Then you have the question of how--how do we do that?

1:03:34.0

KD: Little by little; it's little by little but then one thing that is very clear to me is that there is not a confidence in our government--at the city level, at the state level; we don't trust them, we don't have the confidence in them. They have for many, many years I always heard that and

people of Louisiana they have always make a joke out of that. That you can make a joke out of that, that's our way of living--well that's the way they are.

1:04:08.4

LW: That's how it's always been.

1:04:10.5

KD: And they drink their beer and they have some fun and always--almost our music and our laid back attitude and--and all the--because we're well known for being a party--party city. We--we're always looking for the next party to crash, but I think it's a way to cope--to cope with the reality that all these years we see a city and the government, they--they don't work on our behalf, you know on our people. Even though I might be in good shape and I'm going to tell you something and it's true. Every time I used to go to--by New Orleans East by--you know Esplanade Avenue and then you go through St. Claude and then you have St. Claude and then--in the area--.

1:05:08.4

LW: Judge Perez--

1:05:08.7

KD: Judge Perez, and all the St. Bernard [Parish] well I used to--and--and this is--I mean I'm guilty of these thoughts, but I remember when I used to get off on Harrison--I think Harrison, get off on Harrison because I used to buy supplies--supplies and you know in a warehouse there and we used to go left to right and see all these houses and black people on the corner, just like this. They look like it's right in my country you know like a blur. I said this--this--I hope--I hope water or burn or something kind of wipe all these people out so they're disarmed. I mean it's just the houses, but they--it's how--you know I don't know maybe 20--30 miles of just shackles. I mean these shotguns with the black people in the front, huge land just living by--.

1:06:07.8

LW: Houses that used to be really beautiful at one time.

1:06:10.1

KD: It used to? Well--really, okay; I don't know.

1:06:14.7

LW: When they were built those places must have looked so pretty.

1:06:17.6

KD: Well I don't know but when--and believe me, when I used to get off and I saw all--when I used to go to the Farmers Market and not the French Quarter because the French Quarter, we took about from Esplanade all the way--all the way down. Say what it will take to wipe all this damn place out along with--along with the people? These people don't have no sense of nothing. They just have--don't have nothing all this life and look what happened. But the fool for me is--is the leaders of the community and--and--and it's the leader of the community--don't give me the crap that they don't have no money; don't give me the crap that they don't have money. It's people that have been abandoned by their leaders in their community and they just have been like that for so many years that--that the other [inaudible] was death. I'm used to seeing my God it's going to take—and look what happened; they're all wiped out. So now you know I know--I know; you might be living a good neighborhood and have a good life and a decent job and used to go to parties every weekend but you--you see the other way; you see the other side. You draw on the other side of Esplanade and see all that and--and you know you--

1:07:53.0

LW: People identify there; they don't go there and they don't see it.

1:07:57.0

KD: They--I don't know but the--the bottom line, Laura, is that there had never been a trust and confidence that the Government will do good, and right now, this is just like we have touched the

bottom and people are like--that's what people--even before Katrina, people--people were leaving.

LW: Yes.

1:08:27.0

KD: I mean it was the news before Katrina; people were leaving because of the economy, because there was no jobs or the jobs are \$5 an hour; there is no real business. This was a sense of depression and we tied it up with corruption and all that--people cope with--with what we have, with our jazz and our parades and then--and then we're a culture and that is the people--the people--that's how the people in Louisiana have coped with what they're lacking.

1:09:04.9

LW: Now when you moved here what were you told about the fact that our city is in a basin, that we're below sea level and about the levies? What did people tell you when you came here?

1:09:20.3

KD: Well exactly like that--the first thing--I lived the first three years in Uptown and I was always asking them why we need to go up to go to the houses? They say well because there are floods and when it rains the water don't go anywhere; it stays. And I said, you know, you just

that kind of scene to go the river and I need to go up--it just doesn't make sense, and I used to live in the mountains. When I go to my rivers to do white-water rafting, you go down.

1:09:55.8

LW: You're not used to looking up to see a boat go by?

1:09:57.4

KD: And--and this flood situation and I came in 1990; it was in 1995 when we had these big flood in--in Uptown and I lost my car. I remember I was working in Magazine Street and it was 4 o'clock and--and my boss told me go home. And--because they said it's going to rain and this rain is going to be really bad. I said so it's going to flood? He said the chances--I mean the people kind of have a sense and I remember--to my little car, and I--I drove about three blocks. About that time the water was one-foot. I drove one more block it was two-feet. By the time that I--I drove one more block, which was almost--almost--I was getting close to Claiborne because I was coming from Magazine going like on Jefferson, trying to get on Claiborne, I--I got out from the window. I mean had to jump like in the pool and with--with the water, so I kind of got a first day--oops this is--this is a hole and that's when I decided to get out of there.

1:11:09.3

LW: So it was after that you moved to St. Rose?

1:11:10.6

KD: That's when I decided to move to Metairie and from Metairie to St. Rose. That's where you know--because that was my first awakening and basically--

1:11:23.0

LW: Yeah; and you were responsible for your mother at that time as well?

1:11:26.4

KD: Well my mother was not here.

1:11:26.9

LW: Oh she wasn't?

1:11:28.2

KD: My mom was not here yet, but that was for rain; that was a rain.

1:11:35.2

LW: I remember that.

1:11:34.8

KD: Do you remember that?

1:11:36.2

LW: I was coordinating the--part of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival at that time.

1:11:40.2

KD: Really?

1:11:41.1

LW: And I can tell you the Fair Grounds were--if New Orleans is a bowl, then the Fair Grounds
[Laughs] are a dip in the bowl, and it flooded--and we used hay to soak up the water but the hay
always smells like horse manure.

1:12:01.4

KD: Really? I don't know what it smells.

1:12:05.3

LW: It--

1:12:04.3

KD: It--it was bad.

1:12:07.3

LW: Yes; and I don't know why that--I don't know where they get that hay but it's--you can definitely tell that--

1:12:13.2

KD: Oh, *hay*; yes, hay.

1:12:14.7

LW: Straw.

1:12:15.3

KD: Straw; yes.

1:12:17.4

LW: So it smells like horses and it is not a good smell--

1:12:21.0

KD: It is bad.

1:12:22.5

LW: --when the sun comes out, it's--

1:12:24.7

KD: Stink?

1:12:25.2

LW: Yeah; so it was--a lot of, you know, the equipment had fallen into the water and--.

1:12:34.3

KD: That was the Jazz Festival you said?

1:12:34.5

LW: Yes, and now I don't know what's going to happen but I'm still close with those folks and we're hoping--and we may not be able to do it in time--but we're hoping that some of the materials that come out of this interview process, this documentation, will end up as an exhibit there sometime. We'll have to work really fast to make that happen this year, and they're just back in the offices beginning today, so we'll see. We don't really know what's going to happen.

1:13:09.8

KD: Yeah; everybody is in the same boat. It's--it's an unknown future.

1:13:15.6

LW: Now you were very smart about the way you got out--

1:13:21.4

KD: Oh, got out--?

1:13:24.2

LW: --and that sort of thing, but has your personal outlook changed as a result of this storm? I mean ,you've already been through so much and you've made the decision to move so far away from your original home and coming here, and then moved twice since you were here, and St. Rose has got to be--you were saying that moving to New Orleans was easier coming from Costa Rica because the culture and the music were--.

1:13:54.2

KD: Yeah; but it's the region. There's so much--just look at St. Rose. It's the same--it's the same thing.

1:14:00.0

LW: So--so you were able to find things about St. Rose?

1:14:02.2

KD: Yeah; it's the same--it's the--I mean even in Baton Rouge--

1:14:05.9

LW: So has the storm had as big an effect on you as it has on some other folks? I mean, have your ideas about your life, and your expectations, changed?

1:14:21.0

KD: Yes, yes; they have changed. Personally I became resentful--resentful.

1:14:30.6

LW: Resentful?

1:14:30.9

KD: Resentful.

1:14:32.0

LW: Of the--the government—the local government?

1:14:34.3

KD: Yes; I became very resentful and that's a big issue. It's--it's like I said you do leave-- isolated; you just don't have a job and go home and then go to the supermarket and go home without being affected by what is happening around you. You are connected with your leaders; you are connected with your community; you--you are a part of a--of a system, like I said, and if you--your life is pretty--I mean your life--you want to have a sense of community growing, of justice or—or, you know, of safety, that you're living in a safe environment, that the people that is taking care of you like a child, like a father takes care of your children--do you see what I'm saying? So when you look up, and you don't have no more confidence, and you try to regain the confidence; it's for your best interest but you--you--I personally am very resentful because-- because in the past years I used to work for Economic Development with the City of New Orleans and the airport and that was kind of close, seeing the things from the inside out, and then what I saw was no justice. But all Governments are like that; this is not the only one but now it's as a regular citizen, as a regular resident like you and I--I think I'm--I'm resentful--when I'm struggling and I'm kind of--I'm mad--I'm mad.

1:16:35.8

LW: Uh-hm; it's a healthy response.

1:16:36.8

KD: I'm mad.

1:16:38.1

LW: Anger is a lot better than depression.

1:16:41.7

KD: I'm mad but I--I'm depressed too so it's always--it's all these feelings and then you have to get up and you have to make the best of the day and--and--and see you know like--see what you can do at your church and help your neighborhood to clean up and try to become--go to a normal phase again. So that's I think what our--what all of us is traveling--for--for the people that kind of know and, you know like the Crescent City Farmers Market, you know I says it's not fair that a lot of them they lost their crops. It's just--but that's how life--it is. I mean but--there is always people, like I said, the leaders should take care of--of you. And for the--from over there to here I don't think they--they're doing a good job. But that's--that's what the problem is--it's not just--

1:17:49.9

LW: And just changing your attitude isn't going to help it.

1:17:51.2

KD: It's not--not just fairs and it's not just Mardi Gras; I mean it's just--it's a good thing that we're talking about it but on the other hand it's--it's making me mad. You know this is not just

Jazz Fest and Mardi Gras, and--and what else--and all these parties. We can't have--live in the fantasy anymore; it's like living in a fantasy and you know I see the--the leaders talking about what makes the City work which is the tourist industry and then we are puppets of that fantasy. We are like puppets of--of that fantasy; we're the party city and--and yeah, because it's a party city. It's beautiful things, but also a party city, but we are--we are part of that stage and they try to put that stage together but those puppets are all wet and all drab-hat and all--all like that and I said no, no, no. You're not taking care of your equipment. I mean--I mean and then--and then they getting--and the tourists--it's going to bring the tourists back and I said well we just--we just need to kind of get into the--get into the mood.

1:19:18.5

LW: Yes; they do seem to be the--the things that are mentioned are the spirit of this area. Does this seem to you to indicate the kind of priorities that led us into this situation, you know, putting all your attention on making outsiders have a good experience here is very different from letting locals have a good experience living here.

1:19:39.8

KD: You just said--just said the magic word, and I think what happened was because we--the way we see our--we the people in the audience we had good spirits and the way we have coped is to get into it--get in the mood, and so that's why you know we always get into--get--we had the spirit of you know good food, good relationships, family that would get together and get--but the

bottom like is that we feel that they don't take care of us; they always take care of the people that come and [inaudible] us and--and put out the big show, while we try to kind of put our own little happiness, make our own happiness. But the bottom line, they--they're not making ourselves live in comfortable environment. So you--you're right; you're right. That's the thing; they--they want people to come but they don't take care of us. They have never done that; they're--we are the ones who have taken care of us. So and that--you will hear that over and over again--it's not just me; you will hear--and who knows what's going to happen, and hopefully maybe these leaders have changed their mentality and--and will be less selfish.

1:21:08.2

LW: We'll see; the next election will be very interesting. Well, is there anything we haven't talked about that--that you would like to be on the record, or anything that you're thinking of that I have forgotten to ask you?

1:21:21.0

KD: Well I want to point out--make emphasis that in order for us to kind of survive and grow is to support our own business. Come to this place and drink the coffee here; we're supporting this--this shop, okay. Buy Louisiana-made products like our cheese. I know that the people of Louisiana have the tendency--well more than ever we need to support and--and I'm not making a personal advertisement for myself but it's--it's all this micro mom and pop businesses that tries to sell the cheese or their potatoes or their bread; support the local merchants. Support them

because, more than ever, they need the help of their consumers. And--and that's--I mean how am I going to--to make the cheese and how am I going to put it in the stores; that will be something that I will have to work with--for instance, the [Crescent] City Farmers Market and several other non-profit entities to promote and market the product. But the bottom line is the community, the need to support, and ask for, Louisiana-made products and make it--make it stand-up, okay. This is ours; if--if you want a product you will sell--the guy who--who milked the cow, the guy who distributed the cow, you know, the retail store who sell the cow--all of them will--will get a piece and, in turn, they will hire more people, so that's what is economic development. Some people don't think that way, you know, but they should support local merchants. Support them; it's the only way to--to get out of this mob. I mean, you know, as far as my cheeses, we--we will see what happens. That's something that I love to do, that we love to do; it's in my heart and--and wherever I go, I know that I'm going to continue making cheese for--for business and for pleasure. I will continue to do that but I don't know here, you know. We--we have to go day by day and--and--and see what happens.

1:24:05.3

LW: I thought of one final thing I want to ask you.

1:24:07.7

KD: Uh-hm.

1:24:08.2

LW: What is your favorite of the cheeses that you make?

1:24:10.5

KD: Oh the Fresco, the--the real Queso Fresco, the plain one. The one I am going to show you next.

1:24:19.8

LW: Okay; and that's the one that you--that you saw the--the ladies making when you were small? That's the main one you remember?

1:24:26.0

KD: Yeah; because in--it's--what happened is you had to develop product lines. You cannot sell just one; you have to sell seven, eight different kinds, and the Americans like it with jalapeno, with ranchero, with different flavors, like they do with the coffee, you know. I just drink one coffee. I like one coffee, but right now you go to a coffee shop and get vanilla, cinnamon, and you get all these different coffees with different flavors; it's not just the plain coffee. It's the same thing with the cheese; you like it plain--because the plain-- the plain cheese, you know that-- that's the *one*--that's the original. [*Laughs*]

1:25:17.3

LW: [*Laughs*]

1:25:18.0

KD: Okay; that's the original. The plain one was the original but you--you add all these things to--from different tastes and to change, but the original is always the best, which is the plain one. Usually that's how it works--the same with the coffee. So--so we--I'm going to show you the ones next door.

1:25:42.4

LW: Okay; I'm going to turn this off now and let you--.

[End Kathia Duran]