

**MADONNA BROUSSARD**  
**Owner, Laura's II - Lafayette, LA**

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Interviewer: Rien T. Fertel, Southern Foodways Alliance  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
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Project: Plate Lunch Trail - Louisiana

**[Begin Madonna Broussard Interview]**

**00:00:01**

**Rien Fertel:** This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm in Lafayette, Louisiana on the--what we're calling the Plate Lunch Trail. And I'm here with Madonna Broussard; I'm going to have her introduce herself and please state your name and your birth date for the record.

**00:00:19**

**Madonna Broussard:** Madonna Broussard, June 19, 1969.

**00:00:24**

**RF:** Thank you; and can you tell me what your role is here at--at Laura's II Restaurant?

**00:00:29**

**MB:** I'm the owner and the head cook.

**00:00:33**

**RF:** Okay; and the head cook. How long has Laura's II been opened?

**00:00:38**

**MB:** Eleven years.

**00:00:40**

**RF:** So eleven years, and let's get into--I'm interested in well this is I should say Laura's Roman Numeral II, so there must have been a number one, a Laura's I?

**00:00:53**

**MB:** Yes.

**00:00:54**

**RF:** Can you tell me about Laura's?

**00:00:55**

**MB:** Our number one, well the actual Laura was, Laura's was on Voorhies Street here in Lafayette and probably was in existence since 1968, was probably the first soul food plate lunch spot here in Acadiana in Lafayette, which Laura is my grandmother.

**00:01:17**

**RF:** Okay; can you give me her full name?

**00:01:18**

**MB:** Laura Williams Broussard.

**00:01:21**

**RF:** Okay; and do you know when she was born either the date or the year?

**00:01:25**

**MB:** She was born in September of wow, I can't remember the year, but she died at 74 years old and it was in 1994, so you kind of do the math. She was the only, only restaurant here; been cooking for a number of years here in the city.

**00:01:52**

**RF:** Okay; and how far was her location on Voorhies Street from where we are now on University?

**00:01:56**

**MB:** About--about two miles, not far; we're in the same vicinity, just in the back door. This--our new spot is in the back door from our old place.

**00:02:07**

**RF:** Okay; tell me about her. What--you say she opened in 1968; was she--was it her first business? What did she do before that?

**00:02:16**

**MB:** Her--her first I think her first job was actually cooking in a club here in the city downtown and I think the name of it--I was told the name of it was probably the Sam's Star Lounge. That was her first job. Her--her role was probably cooking since she was 10 years old for her siblings. And she's--she's--she's always told us that--that was her first love just to actually cook for her mom and her grandmothers and her sisters and brothers. She went on to open up, and I'd probably say maybe earlier than the '60s because I think she was just kind of cooking out of her

house, just doing plate lunches out of her house and then I think in the early '60s the--the late '60s she started out with actually opening up a restaurant and serving and collecting money.

**00:03:12**

**RF:** Okay; and how far was that first restaurant? Did she--well let me ask; did she grow up in this area?

**00:03:18**

**MB:** She--

**00:03:19**

**RF:** Is she from Lafayette?

**00:03:20**

**MB:** Is--yes; she's from Lafayette, grew up in this area. Her--her mom I think her--her--my--her mother's family are extended from Kaplan, the Kaplan area.

**00:03:35**

**RF:** And when she--when she first started cooking out of her house do you know what she served?

**00:03:42**

**MB:** Some of the same items we're serving now, baked turkey wings, fried pork chops; she was a seafood lover so I know she had catfish, fried chicken, I know because those are some of the items that we've had for years that people still remember us by.

**00:04:02**

**RF:** Okay; and when--did you work in her--with her ever?

**00:04:08**

**MB:** No; I didn't. We [*Laughs*] always were eating and going to Sunday dinners at her house. Every Sunday was like a big mama style dinner, every Sunday; she cooked a spread of food but I didn't actually get to work with her. I--I did when I was younger; she made a lot of boudin in the city for different people so I actually was able as a young--younger, about 14 years old to help like link boudin, but didn't really take the secret in. Don't know what she did; but it was just--used my hands to link the boudin. But to say work in--in house with her--no; I hadn't.

**00:04:54**

**RF:** Was she making--she was making boudin at home or in her restaurant?

**00:04:58**

**MB:** At home--at home--at home.

**00:05:00**

**RF:** Was she raising pigs or was she just--was she buying pork?

**00:05:03**

**MB:** Buying pork; she bought a pork, did all the--all the grinding, everything. It was a whole day process and every day. I mean people knew her for her boudin.

**00:05:17**

**RF:** And what would she--on these Sunday dinners, I'm interested in those. What was she cooking; was it the same menu that she would serve in the restaurant and then what you've carried over?

**00:05:25**

**MB:** Her Sunday menus were never what we had that they served in the restaurant because I remember fondly of my first time eating like a tongue, a beef tongue. She had a Christmas style dinner every Sunday--yams with marshmallows and pecans, just really big style menu--you know big, big menus that she would get up in the morning. Her and my grandfather went to church on Sundays--Saturdays, so Sundays were her day--was her day to really just cook like for the neighborhood or for different people.

**00:06:00**

**RF:** How many people would be at these Sunday dinners?

**00:06:01**

**MB:** Sometimes it was just my--our family, my dad and my mom and my brother and I and my grandmother raised her--her daughter's two sons. They lived--because my aunt lived in Los

Angeles. So we were probably never--'cause we're not a big family; we were probably maybe six but she had food for 30. **[Laughs]**

**00:06:23**

**RF:** And what--oh tell me about her husband.

**00:06:32**

**MB:** My--my grandfather worked for at the time it had to be called Southern Pacific for 40--45 years before he retired. So he was not really inside you know the restaurant because he had a railroad job. But he was always the one that was the go-getter to go get, you know, fish and he loved to fish; he loved to go pick up the ribs and pick up items. He was never in-house cooking with her. She probably wouldn't have allowed it. **[Laughs]**

**00:07:04**

**RF:** What kind of cook was she at home?

**00:07:08**

**MB:** Definitely--definitely Creole cooking, all--all every day, all the time, basically ever--every day was a big meal at my grandmother's. She had--she had in her house, she had kind of like a gambling, little area where they played a lot of cards. They played cards at her house. Her friends would come over. I really don't know the game that they played but they played cards. So that gave her an opportunity also to cook a big spread for her and her friends and the same people

would come and play cards. So that was her day to have a big--she called it like a supper club outside of the restaurant, so she'd always have a big meal.

**00:07:55**

**RF:** And what sort of personality was she like in the kitchen? Was she the only one that she-- was she the only one that could cook in her--on her own stove?

**00:08:03**

**MB:** No; she was--my grandmother's personality was very, very--you would probably be taken aback by her because she was a very large woman. She sat a lot, so she cooked over--you know, she sat over the stove and she stirred and she'd cook, and she was that type that was demanding. Get this; get that, but you could never put it in for her. We were always her legs because she was a very, you know, very large tall-statured woman.

**00:08:35**

If you saw her [*Laughs*], she almost looked like, you know, a little--like she was the-- definitely she was the chief. She was the chief. And a lot of people would be taken aback by her but her personality outside of that was awesome. She was a very wonderful sweet caring person.

**00:08:57**

**RF:** And so tell me again when her restaurant closed?

**00:09:02**

**MB:** Actually and I'm going to try to be on point with the dates but I know in the '70s the restaurant burned which was in her house. It was in her actual house and I would say maybe

about '75 or something like that; I'm not certain on the date but we had a--a fire that just destroyed the--'cause the restaurant, it was her house in the front and like the restaurant in the back part which was a huge scale. It almost looked like a club; I don't know how that passed back in the day. But it was--it was distinctive. You would just think that it was really going to her house, but it was an actual restaurant.

**00:09:47**

And then in the early '80s she--she took up into like a little trail-type metallic building and made just a little restaurant in that and that's what she served out of. Up until '84 is when she retired and my mom and dad took over. My--my mother which was her daughter-in-law kind of took over and they expanded the operation from like just adding onto a little metallic building and that was like the--the glory years.

**00:10:24**

**RF:** Okay; tell me more about--well tell me about your--your parents. Give me their names first?

**00:10:29**

**MB:** My mom's name is Dorothy Broussard and my father's name is Harold Broussard. My mom was Laura's daughter-in-law and I think that she commanded a lot of respect with my grandmother because she actually--a lot of people came to think that she was Miss Laura, but it was actually her mother-in-law, my grandmother--retired and just due to her health. But she still, you know, her presence was still in the--you know, in the restaurant when my mom took over and just kind of revamped a lot of things. My grand--as my grandmother's way--and put--put the

restaurant in a new direction in the '80s here in Lafayette, whereas the--the clientele had gotten larger. It was in a--in a residential area so you had to know where we were. You had to know where that spot was.

**00:11:30**

**RF:** Where was that spot?

**00:11:30**

**MB:** Off of Voorhies. And that--it's the same spot 'cause my grandmother's house was on the side at that time after it burned. She--she moved her house, like moved a movable home on the side, and then the metallic building. So it was all in the same area and you had to know where we were because you came down a dead-end street and that was our spot.

**00:11:53**

So my mother, with the direction of my grandmother, kind of flowed a different--just had a different flow opposed to it being like in the early '60s and '70s. Once they got to the '80s there was just a little more--the menu had changed. You know, my mom was doing, you know, a little more gigs; she was doing caterings, whereas my grandmother just did--she ran a real mom and pop.

**00:12:21**

**RF:** Uh-hm; did she change the menu at all?

**00:12:24**

**MB:** No; the menu never changed--'til today we still have the same items. Some of the items I deleted when I came through.

**00:12:34**

**RF:** What were some of those?

**00:12:35**

**MB:** [*Laughs*] Back in the early times they did like pork shanks, a lot of like pig, you know, pig's feet and pork shank stew and cowboy stew. I just felt that those were some staples that a lot of people wouldn't gravitate to, just being so health conscious now. But we still sell a lot of pork; we just--those were items that my grandmother--and my mom came from like a family also just like cooks that just did some down home country cooking, which was like pork stew, cowboy stew, pork shanks--I still remember people asking me, "Why you don't serve those pork shanks your grandmother had 30 years ago on Tuesday--?"

**00:13:23**

**RF:** They still ask today?

**00:13:25**

**MB:** They still ask today.

**00:13:28**

**RF:** Huh; do you remember the pork shanks, what--what--?

**00:13:30**

**MB:** I remember the pork shank stew. I just--I don't--I just think people are more health conscious than to eat a lot of fat--fat, fat, fat on their plate. Back in the day that was like a big item.

**00:13:43**

**RF:** What--can you describe that stew?

**00:13:45**

**MB:** It's ham hocks. It's just like fresh ham hocks and she would--she would cook it into like a gravy and make just the stew with it and it's more of a fat rind. Instead of like a lot of times people eat it now just smoked hocks; they were fresh, going into like a pot of roux and water and gravy, cooked for a long time and served. So that's just a staple that I did in the beginning and then I--I stopped.

**00:14:17**

**RF:** Hmm; and how did your mother and your grandmother get along--your mom taking over the business?

**00:14:24**

**MB:** Yeah; my mom and my grandmother, you would have really thought that my mother was my grandmother's daughter. My grandmother's daughter lived in California from the early years, and she was not in the business. But my mother was right alongside her. I think probably from the beginning of when her and my dad probably met, my mother was there with her working.

00:14:49

**RF:** Oh, so she was cooking at the original--your grandmother?

00:14:54

**MB:** She--my mom was cooking at--at--at some of the original yes, and that had to be like in '69, '70 my mom was cooking with her. And her and my dad probably had just got married. My mom was kind of, you know, under her direction cooking--learning 'cause from what my mom says, she came to Lafayette and she didn't know how to boil an egg.

00:15:18

**RF:** Where was your mom from?

00:15:18

**MB:** Parks, Louisiana.

00:15:21

**RF:** And did your father play any role in either of the two first restaurants?

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**MB:** My dad did; my dad worked for a company. He worked for an environmental company, but every day at a certain time on his lunch break he came through. But he grew up with my--being my grandmother's only son, he definitely was you know in the business all the time and working and just doing like a side gig all the time with my grandmother.

00:15:51

**RF:** Okay; and did your mom also cook at home?

00:15:53

**MB:** My mom cooked at home, yes. It's amazing how my mom left a restaurant and came home. Her and my dad, and we would have like meals. We didn't have big fancy meals like my grandmother did on Sundays 'cause we would go to her house. But my mom did some cooking-- her fair share of cooking at home.

00:16:14

**RF:** Did she do cooking like Sunday dinners like your grandmother did?

00:16:18

**MB:** No. [*Laughs*] My mom never did the Sunday dinners like my grandmother. My grandmother's Sunday dinners and our Sundays were probably at my grandmother's house.

00:16:29

**RF:** Oh, you'd still spend the Sundays there.

00:16:31

**MB:** Yeah; we would go to her house on Sundays to have dinner with her and my grandfather.

00:16:36

**RF:** And when did that second iteration of Laura's close?

**00:16:41**

**MB:** Well in, about the late '90s--about '99 my--my parents--my parents divorced in '94. My dad was really--the ship was sort of sinking. We were still known in the city, from since the early '60s, and just our name was present but my dad just couldn't do it alone, just--just some bad deals, financial mishaps, and then I came along. My husband and I came along and decided that we--we had a very good operation. I came from working at a textile company; I worked for Fruit of the Loom for 10 years before I started this job here. And I just decided that I didn't know much but I knew the business. I knew the business; I knew the food. I just chose not to do it, you know, when I was younger.

**00:17:39**

And then we knew that we had to keep my grandmother's name here and keep our business going. So we decided to close our spot on Voorhies. It was so residential. The neighborhood had not failed but just the old neighborhood was gone. The older people that was there, when my grandmother was there, and I just think and like in the late '90s, early 2000 people just got to be more you know--was looking for more storefront. With everything going on in this city, Lafayette getting bigger and restaurants coming in, it would be hard for people to find a Laura's in that little--it wasn't even in the cul-de-sac. It was on a dead-end in a residential area. So you really had to know where we were. The area was sort of failing but not--the crime wasn't bad, but it was just you had to know where we were and it was in too much of a neighborhood.

**00:18:42**

So we decided to come a little more storefront and that's how we landed--this building on University.

**00:18:49**

**RF:** Okay; and did your mother or father help you open this location?

**00:18:52**

**MB:** My--my mother and father were with me. They helped me with some knowledge of the customer base because my--my husband played the financial factor in it. My parents both were, at the time both were ill. My mom was--she had gotten ill; my dad had gotten disabled also. But their--their presence here meant everything, because a lot of people didn't know Madonna Broussard, but they knew Harold. They knew Dorothy. They knew Miss Dot. You know, is that the same Laura's? Is that going to be the same people?

**00:19:33**

So their presence here was--I mean awesome, and just their presence here really helped us to become 11 years strong that it being you know people just was assured that, are y'all the same, even if we were Laura's II back then my--my parents and my grandmother I still say had a mom and pop operation so there was no--they didn't do any Secretary of State filings. They didn't do you know any legal paperwork. So anybody could have opened up a Laura's and--and make *beaucoup* [a lot of] money in this city. So they--they really and truly--their presence and the--and their knowledge, my mom's knowledge of this is how we do stuff, that's how we do stuff, and it taught me a lot with my--both of my parents here, being divorced. They worked awesome together.

**00:20:32**

**RF:** You mentioned a Miss Dot; who was that?

**00:20:33**

**MB:** That was my mother.

**00:20:36**

**RF:** That was her nickname?

**00:20:37**

**MB:** Her nickname, Miss Dot.

**00:20:38**

**RF:** Did any other employees carry over during that period? Well tell me first what--what month and year did this location Laura's II open?

**00:20:46**

**MB:** I opened up in January 2000.

**00:20:50**

**RF:** And did any employees carry over?

**00:20:52**

**MB:** From our old spot--no. None of the employees carried over. We started out--except my mother; we started out just like family. My brother was a part of the old Laura's, the older operation--even into the '80s. My--I have a brother who is a year older than me, and he actually was the brains of the operation with my parents. I, like I said, went onto work for a textile company. My brother worked tooth and nail his whole heart and soul into Laura's with my parents and alongside my grandparents too, as a younger boy. I was the one who kind of strayed away but strayed back.

**00:21:41**

**RF:** What was his name, your brother?

**00:21:42**

**MB:** Roderick Broussard.

**00:21:43**

**RF:** Roderick? And what sort of things did he do at the two Laura's?

**00:21:47**

**MB:** Actually my brother was probably one of--very, very good cook here you know and--and had a lot of--had a lot of people that the stuff that he cooked you know people--he was known for some of the items that he did. He was their barbecue guy, and we're still known today for the barbecue.

**00:22:12**

My first cousin also; we had--our whole operation really was my grandmother and her grandkids and my--my dad and my mom. We were five grandkids, and all five of us made, you know--at one point or the other--I was the only girl grandchild but the four other boys, they were all cooks or laborers or did something that came out of this business, and it's just we're actually just the three of us. It's my brother and I, and I have one little cousin; two of them have passed away but all have gone on. My cousin that passed away, he was a chef offshore alongside my brother also. That's what he does now. They're--they were both cooks offshore but my cousin passed away.

00:23:01

**RF:** So does your brother still help at this restaurant?

00:23:06

**MB:** No. *[Laughs]* My brother, no; his--his presence is needed sometimes but my brother is--he's very--his job is very demanding offshore. So a lot of times if I really need--or I have questions he's in-house or he'll come through but no, not often; in the earlier years when I first opened, he came on. When he would come from his seven days or twenty-one days he would definitely come give a hand and just show some direction for us for our barbecue, and which is still--we're still doing now.

00:23:41

**RF:** What days do you serve barbecue?

00:23:43

**MB:** On Thursdays and Sundays.

00:23:46

**RF:** And what--what do you barbecue, chicken and pork?

00:23:49

**MB:** Chicken and ribs; I barbecue ribs.

00:23:50

**RF:** And do you make the sauce?

00:23:53

**MB:** We make the sauce.

00:23:54

**RF:** Can you describe the sauce, I mean, without telling me you know any secrets?

00:23:58

**MB:** Our sauce--our sauce is very, very sweet. We have a very sweet and tangy sauce but we just kind of go towards more of a sweeter sauce than it being just tangy. It's not like a rub-on; it's actually once our barbecue is done we actually immerse it in our sauce and it's cooked in, you know, all together instead of just something we baste on. We never baste it on our stuff; we actually put our ribs and then we just kind of put it all together.

00:24:31

**RF:** Okay; and do any family members work here with you?

00:24:34

**MB:** Yes; my--my daughter is here. She has been here with Laura's probably since she's two years old.

00:24:43

**RF:** And what is her name?

00:24:44

**MB:** Lacey Broussard; and my son is actually here also. His name is Olace Broussard and my husband is here. My husband kind of played the same role as my dad did with my mother. My husband works for the same company my dad did 25 years ago. My husband got on with the same company so when his--when he has a break from his job his presence is in here, but alongside us on the weekends he's here, so--.

00:25:18

**RF:** And what roles do your children play here?

00:25:20

**MB:** Children [*Laughs*]; actually my kids are very, very wonderful. They--they really and truly help me a lot. My daughter is more of a PR kind of--she has not learned how to cook anything.

She's a good prepper and a good, you know, helper to me; she's kind of like my assistant, you know, away from--away from here, you know. She does like the managing part for me. And that we--we really don't do a lot, but her presence is definitely here. She knows everything that we do; she knows how to--how we would prepare it. She just doesn't get her hands put in it as much. But when needing me she does.

**00:26:03**

My--my son is actually going to probably be the Laura's number III, IV, and V. He is--he is really and truly--he's 18 years old. He's straight out of school, and I think this is what he wants to do.

**00:26:20**

**RF:** Was he the young man at the cash register?

**00:26:20**

**MB:** Yes; he was. So we're--that's usually my daughter's job, but she's out today. So my son is basically like our--he's taking the role like my brother and being our barbecue guy. He's our stirrer. He's our--the heavy lifter. He's learning a lot of the business.

**00:26:40**

**RF:** Does he enjoy cooking?

**00:26:41**

**MB:** He does; he does. He really does. He's--and he's actually my cook at home.

00:26:48

**RF:** Okay; what does he cook at home?

00:26:49

**MB:** He'll probably cook any--any kind of thing that we cook in here. He can take out of here and just make it in a small skillet for myself and his dad and I but he's good at chicken, baked chicken, fried chicken, chicken fricasee, everything--he's gumbo, he's crawfish étouffée good; he's everything good, uh-hm.

00:27:10

**RF:** Good; and tell me about some of the ladies that you see when you first walk into Laura's II. Have they--who has been here the longest?

00:27:19

**MB:** The longest has been my cousin. She's kin to me on my mother's side. Her name is Veronica Phillips. She's been with me the longest. She's endured a lot of the stuff that my mom--when my mom was here, before she retired. She has learned, and then like I said I come from a family of cooks. She's my mom's first cousin--on my mom's side. So she came in with a lot of knowledge of you know how we cook stuff even because we were all neighbors growing up.

00:27:50

And she has been here the longest. She's the best gravy maker, homemade gravy maker there is. She--she learned the consistency from my mother and I--you know how we want stuff, how everything is done. I also have another lady, Geralyn Faulk; she does a lot of the prepping, all our baked chickens, all our seasonings, she does. I have some really good ladies, very good.

**00:28:23**

I have another lady, Lorreta Davis. She is no relation but she's a very good homemade cook. You know not--most of my ladies are homemade cooks. We don't really do anything that comes out of a box or everything we cook down, she's been boiling beans at her house probably since she was a little girl, so all of these factors have played into my spot. Now the ladies--I really didn't have to train them in regards to not knowing how to cook stuff home style. They all basically you know knew what to do as far as home-style cooking, homemade with roux and water and just starting off from scratch.

**00:29:08**

**RF:** Okay; let--you mentioned your gravy. Let's talk about that. I think it's rightly famous. I've been eating it since I was a kid and--.

**00:29:15**

**MB:** Yes; we have a very good homemade gravy that we just basically start off from water and roux that--we make our own roux in an oven and start our own gravy every morning. It's based with a gravy aid, like a coloring, like a Kitchen Bouquet type thing naturally, and we--we thicken it ourselves through a sauce, through a base but basically everything in our gravy is from scratch. And it's probably our--one of the staples here also that has made us known because a lot of people--a lot of husbands come through here and say, "Wow, my wife does not know how to make gravy."

**00:29:58**

**RF:** What do you think makes your gravy better or different than others?

**00:30:01**

**MB:** I think our gravy is--it's the seasonings; it's just the consistency of the gravy also. If you-- if you put our gravy on a rice, it won't just kind of run down. It'll actually stick to the rice. It's brown in color which is also a good thing. I mean in the South people really look for more of a brown gravy. I've had people to come through that were out-of-towners and say well we don't really know what gravy is. You know we usually eat rice with a butter or just dried rice, but--or white sauce. But we actually have a brown roux gravy.

**00:30:42**

**RF:** And is it the same gravy that your grandmother made?

**00:30:46**

**MB:** The same gravy that my grandmother has probably been doing for all these years. When I first came here, some of the equipment that I took with me here from our old spot probably, and I still probably have pans from early, early in the years, and I can recall when I first started here with my husband and I there were pots that we took you know from our old spot that probably had been used for years.

**00:31:21**

**RF:** Do you still use them or are they in storage?

**00:31:22**

**MB:** No; they're gone. We just--they're gone, but those were the same pots, the same--a lot of the things that my grandmother had and even the tendencies you know with our--the way we do a lot of the work and the way we do a lot of things, I recall from being like 10 years old watching just, you know standing there watching. It's the same way that I have you know formed my ladies to do now.

**00:31:48**

**RF:** Where do you think your grandmother learned to cook? Was it from her mom or--?

**00:31:54**

**MB:** I--I've heard a story that my grandmother has always said that she was, I don't know where she fell in line with her sisters and brothers, but she was more of the elder of the you know--there were--there were a bunch. And my grandmother's mother and--and her daughter were--my great-grandmother, I recall it, and I had to be 10. She passed away when she was like 103. They were in the house with my grandmother. So my grandmother probably was the--the cook and that's what she said. She had to stand on a box and cook at the stove for the other kids. She didn't--she didn't have much education.

**00:32:42**

And I think she said she had a third grade education and that was it. She had to stay home and do the cooking while her mother probably went out to do some form of laboring you know in those years. But my grandmother was the definite cook and she said she had to do all the cooking for her sisters and brothers.

00:33:05

**RF:** When your grandmother was older did she only eat her own food or did she enjoy other food?

00:33:09

**MB:** I'm going to be--it's going to be safe to say my grandmother was a--she was a critiquing kind of person. If she ate your food she critiqued it. **[Laughs]** Nobody could have cooked like her; she was that kind of person. It's good but they should have did it this way. You know it's good but they should have did it that way. And I remember that 'cause a lot of times my mom would say--and I remember my mom saying--oh, she would call--everybody called my grandmother Laura--Laura and we called her grandma Laura. But my mom called her Laura; you know and my mom would say, "Wow!" you know, like Laura--"nobody can please Laura. You know nobody's food can please her."

00:33:51

So she was definitely that person; if you brought something over she would critique it and tell you, you know, "It's good but it's," you know, "not good." You could have done this you know or you could have used that." So, I really don't recall my grandmother or us saying that or she--that she ate out a lot. I knew my grandmother had a love for another restaurant here in--which was Lagneaux's and they're still in--in service now. But she had a fond relationship with I think the man that owned it and I think they probably were the two restaurants that were neck and neck. I say my grandmother back in the day was the Queen of Soul Food. And I think--I used to always remember going to Lagneaux's when I was a little girl and the man was out there and

he had a king's hat and he would be like the King of Cajun Cooking. So I--I really, really and truly know that my grandmother probably didn't eat a lot from other, you know--other restaurants or, you know--. You could not have brought food to her. She--if you--if she invited you, you don't come--you come empty handed. I got the food. Anywhere she was invited to she brought the food. **[Laughs]** Always; yes.

**00:35:21**

I also remember often times we--we did family gatherings and the food was my grandmother. It was never like--or my dad and my mom; it was never like other you know family members. If it--if it was a gathering it was Laura's. It was you know Laura who would do the food.

**00:35:39**

**RF:** And it sounds like everyone agreed that she was the best cook.

**00:35:43**

**MB:** I think so; I think so. I don't--always recalling my mother to agree **[Laughs]** but I just knew and even with my dad, they--they was just always the food. They brought the food; uh-hm.

**00:35:55**

**RF:** Yeah; if you could--if you could say this, do you think your mom's cooking, her cooking measured up to your grandmother's?

**00:36:02**

**MB:** I think so because my mom learned just side what she said--she learned side-by-side and if you didn't do it the Laura way then no; it just--it wouldn't go out. And that's definite; that's--I know that. My mom used to always say, "Laura used to make us do this and she used to make us--we had to do it this way." And even if my mom or anybody else would come in and say, Well I know how to do it this way, it was no "This is how we're going to do it." And--and that still stands now. That's--I guess that's just something I heard them say from when I was a child: "We're going to do it the Laura way." And that's just how it goes now 'cause I get a lot of workers that say well I cooked here and I cooked there and I cook at my house. And I said, "Well, let's--let's just do it the Laura's way--the Laura way." And that's really what keeps us consistent and to be in this city this long. Nothing has changed.

**00:37:01**

**RF:** I want to--you mentioned that her--your grandmother's restaurant Laura's was maybe the first soul food restaurant in Lafayette or the first restaurant to serve soul food. How would you describe soul food or define it?

**00:37:14**

**MB:** I--I define soul food as just being something cooked from scratch, you know nothing processed, no--no processed food, because of the fact I know when I grew up as a kid being with my grandmother even on my mom's side of the family and on my grandmother's side of the family and with her, that we had so much food. You know, gatherings was so much food; it was such--it wasn't nothing that you'd just go into the store now, like we do, and just say, well I'm going to pick this up. I'm going to pick up this turkey and just put it--it was all like food from

you know--from thought, from your heart, from--you know from your soul, which you wanted you know in it--not something that somebody else put in it. So that's how I characterize soul food as just something that, you know, you want in it and it's not processed into an item and then come across as being cooked from home or cooked from your own hands.

**00:38:20**

**RF:** Okay; and let's talk about some of the food. What is the most popular dish? I think you have one here.

**00:38:25**

**MB:** I'm going to go back to say our most popular item being Laura's in existence of--from way back was fried pork chops. That's one of our popular items that I guess from coast-to-coast people would still know that they are--Laura's II; wow, those are big fried pork chops. Another item that has gained some popularity now but it's been an item that my grandmother would serve one day a week which was on Wednesdays; she would have baked turkey wings. That's an item that I've incorporated every day into our menu, because people could only get them on--on a Wednesday at Laura's. Now you can get those seven days a week here. That has become our more into the new millennium kind of--that's our best item. But the item that I think that has stuck with us and just we're known for are the fried pork chops.

**00:39:30**

**RF:** Can you describe the--the baked turkey wings?

00:39:35

**MB:** The baked turkey wings come to us as a two-joint turkey wing, sometimes fresh, sometimes frozen--that we get from a local vendor. We process those; we--they're--they come. I'm sorry; they come to us as a three-joint turkey wing. But because they're so large and we're putting them in a plate lunch there's a little tip on it on the wing that we chop off. And we-- everything else we stuff and we bake and pan and put on the plates and we do a lot of them.

00:40:08

**RF:** And what do you stuff it with?

00:40:10

**MB:** We stuff it with a garlic and pepper seasoning. There's no secret to it; it's just a garlic and pepper. A lot of people ask what is the secret; you know how--I tried to do the turkey wings at my house and I can't get them? Well there is a secret to the baking of it but there's no secret ingredient. It's very basic. It's a garlic and pepper seasoning and we season to taste and that's it.

00:40:34

**RF:** And then are they put in a gravy?

00:40:37

**MB:** Uh-um; they're put in--they're put in the oven and baked.

00:40:42

**RF:** Okay; and I was eating a baked turkey wing today. It was awesome. What--I found like there's a crackling on top.

**00:40:49**

**MB:** There is--there is a harder--we try to bake them to get--and that's--it doesn't come all the time. In my beginning times, when I first opened here, I didn't have any convection ovens. I started off just basic, a basic oven and--and then as I grew and grew and grew I knew I wanted to get convection style cooking whereas it'll cook them faster, less time, and just make them more of that crunchy hard--. If we leave them in the oven long enough they'll come out to be crunchy--crunchy little baste on them, a little part--the skin will get very crunchy like a crackling, which a lot of people like and a lot of people don't like. A lot of people like them to just be really tender and more blonde. And then a lot of people will say I want that turkey that wing--that dark and fried-er, you know, more fried into the oven. And a lot of people will say well how did y'all fry those; is that fried turkey? But it's actually baked and we get it to have that fried crackling by just uncovering and doing more like getting a longer convection heat.

**00:42:02**

**RF:** Do you--do you ever run out of the stuffed turkey wings or any other specials or dishes?

**00:42:07**

**MB:** It's first come first served basis on the turkey wings. That's an item that you definitely have to come in for and it's just kind of like a race for it. It's the race for the turkey wings.

**[Laughs]**

**00:42:19**

**RF:** How many do you do a day normally?

**00:42:21**

**MB:** About 90--90 to 100 a day; our slower days on a Saturday we'll probably do less. We'll probably do like 70 or just less but on a--on a given day we'll have 90.

**00:42:38**

**RF:** Okay; and I've definitely experienced y'all running out of turkey wings before noon even. That happens?

**00:42:44**

**MB:** Yes; it happens. It's--it's very--it's an item that people will start calling us for at 7:00 a.m. when we walk in the door. **[Laughs]** We'll have people to call in and ask, well can I place my order, or they'll place their order the day before. If they come on say they came on a Monday and we were out, now they would come back and say, well, look, I'm going to just secure my turkey wing for Tuesday.

**00:43:10**

**RF:** So you can do that at Laura's?

**00:43:11**

**MB:** Yes; you can do that.

**00:43:13**

**RF:** Okay; and do you have customers so dedicated to a certain item that if that item is out when they come they just--they leave?

**00:43:19**

**MB:** Yes; and that's--that's a lot of the times with the turkey wings and the ribs. Those two items are an item that people, we--we have seen the good and the bad in a lot of people in regards to the turkey wings or the ribs. And most of it comes from like on a Sunday.

**00:43:39**

**RF:** Oh, a Sunday is when people really want it.

**00:43:43**

**MB:** Yes.

**00:43:44**

**RF:** What happens; do you get upset people?

**00:43:47**

**MB:** We--and it's just a running joke that we have in here. We're always saying, "Wow; are they just coming from church?" You know, [*Laughs*] to be so angry with us. "Are they just not coming from church?" Our--and it's just due to space. Our--you know we're--our--our operation is so--we have a big operation but our--our space is limited so that limits what we can do. We

would probably have to get here at 3 o'clock in the morning to service everyone who wants a turkey wing and I would just hope in the future maybe because I'm the middle of two businesses that maybe one day you never know. I could expand; I can't go higher but I--each side there's a business so it's one day and we always say, one day we'll expand.

**00:44:38**

**RF:** Is your other business a food business?

**00:44:41**

**MB:** No; I'm saying each--these two buildings are--yeah and we would love to expand.

**00:44:45**

**RF:** Right; okay. Can you describe your clientele?

**00:44:48**

**MB:** Our clientele is a--it's a mixture. There's just no set, you know, color, there's no set person; we--we service everyone and that has been probably since the early--our earlier restaurants that it has just been basic, everybody in the city. No--I don't think anybody is exempt here. With us being--I think my grandmother went as Laura's Soul Food and I--I in turn wanted to be like Laura's II: A Creole Experience. And I think that there's--there's such a big variety of people here. There are Cajuns, there are Creoles; now there's Mexicans--it's just everybody here. So we don't--it's just the clientele is just a full flavor. It's everybody. No one--no one can--no one is exempt here.

**00:45:56**

I think back early on my grandmother had the same clientele, because I know I go a lot of places, doctors' offices and people say, "I've just come to the city," you know. And like, "In 1975 when I was here away from my mother and father, and I'm from New Orleans or from Lake Charles or somewhere, and a friend took me to Laura's II." And it's 30 years now and they're saying we still have the same fried pork chop from when I was at USL. You know and that would be like a lot of doctors or lawyers; they'll say I've been--we've been eating at Laura's II for years from when they were at the University.

**00:46:41**

**RF:** Do you get a lot of out-of-towners or tourists?

**00:46:43**

**MB:** Now I'm seeing where--the festivals and the things that come into Lafayette doesn't generate totally a lot of out-of-towners because I think like the Festival International is downtown. So there's much food down there that people, you know, they don't venture out this way. When--when there are certain, like we have an Oil Show that comes to Lafayette. We get a lot of out-of-towners from that so a lot--basically every function, every event Laura's II will get something from it. You know, people--like this weekend we had the Top 28 Basketball. We had a lot of out-of-towners here. Every time a fair comes either the Cajun Heartland Festival, we get a lot of out-of-towners, event--you know people that are setting up the events.

**00:47:39**

Our out-of-towner base right now is a lot of like railroad guys that we have been noticing that have been coming in frequently, that they're not from here. We have a lot of guys that are-- that are coming through now that's more of Spanish speaking that I do have someone here that-- that can interpret what they're saying 'cause I have a lady who is from the Latin persuasion, I guess that's what I would say. So our--it's just that our clientele base and our out-of-town base is--is rampant; it's pretty rampant.

**00:48:23**

**RF:** And Acadiana has a lot of festivals. Do you ever participate in any of the food or cultural festivals?

**00:48:29**

**MB:** I really don't. I don't do a lot of the festivals because I've--I've always been afraid of rain.

**[Laughs]**

**00:48:39**

**RF:** Or just in general, okay.

**00:48:41**

**MB:** And I just--a lot of the food we sell it's not--it's not fair you know like event friendly. I don't think that I could have a whole lot of rice and gravy and these items--and compete with a lot of say crawfish, boudin balls, and those are not items we sell. You know, so, and I just think that a lot of times the food, say for instance the--the event is rained out or I've never really been

in the city where an event has rained out, you know. It's--it's going to go on anyway but I know a lot of the vendors, you know, if something happens like that they're--they--they'll have to, you know, find a way to incorporate what they have out there. And me, it's just harder for me because we just have a lot of homemade items. So we don't have anything--we're not good at stuff that we can just pop in and--and warm. That's what I'm saying.

**00:49:37**

**RF:** Yeah; how--how have you seen--you're just a couple blocks from like the--the main part of downtown Lafayette. How have you seen Lafayette change in the past 11 years?

**00:49:48**

**MB:** The downtown area for me and a lot of Lafayette has changed whereas there are more chain restaurants. There are a lot of chain restaurants. I really and truly as being more of a Creole you know home style cooking was glad that those--those restaurants hadn't come to the city. And I think it's just a matter of choice. People here whether you're white, black, whatever color, if you know that you want something good and you know that it's consistent I think they have gravitated to that.

**00:50:27**

As far as changing, I've tried to kind of change with the city and there were times when I decided to open up in the evening and it was in 2007. I wanted to open up in the evening and do alcohol and serve like buffalo wings and kind of more of a sports bar type, you know, food and just have a fast or slower menu, fast-food menu but slower, you know, foods, not such as hard rice and gravy.

**00:50:59**

And then my husband and I, we sat back and we thought about that Lafayette has changed from like old Lafayette in the '80s. A lot of people are so health conscious now; they figure if I ate Laura's and I ate 3,000 calories at lunch, I'm not going to eat that same 3,000 calories at night and go to bed with that. So we kind of revamped and thought about we're not a buffalo wing spot. We're not like a hamburger spot. We're not a salad spot. We are a Creole experience, so we need to stick to who we are and what we are and what we represent. And that's the kind of change I knew that the city went through being a lot of stuff on the south side going to you know just a little more trendy. I figured if people want trendy they'll go there; you know they'll go to the south side. If you want home style and just down home--down home atmosphere, friendly attitudes, you'll come here and we'll have that everyday for lunch. And that's it.

**00:52:13**

**RF:** Tell me about some of your best customers. Do you see people every day or almost every day?

**00:52:18**

**MB:** We do; we--I've known people a lot of people that have--that knows me through my grandmother, through my mom and dad and that has been coming to this spot for 30 years. And--and that's even--and that's probably like 50 or more people that I know. I know it's just a--a large group of people and that's just--that's not white, say African Americans; that's whites, that's blacks, you know, people that has been dealing with us for a long time, a long time.

**00:52:59**

**RF:** And do they order the same things every day?

**00:53:02**

**MB:** Order the same thing--order the same; we--we have--in the 11 years I have some people who come here that have come here and probably ate the same thing. And sometimes I'll try to gear them to change, you know and say, "Try this." And they'll say, "Well I'll try it next time but I'm going to stick to what I know and what I'm accustomed to." And that says a lot for us because that just lets me know also that we have been consistent with that product for at least 40 years or more.

**00:53:37**

**RF:** Okay; just a few more questions. What's your favorite thing and least favorite thing to cook here?

**00:53:42**

**MB:** My favorite thing to cook here is the crawfish étouffée.

**00:53:46**

**RF:** And when is that served?

**00:53:47**

**MB:** On Fridays. My least favorite--my least favorite, *[Laughs]*--

00:53:54

**RF:** Or the most difficult to cook?

00:53:58

**MB:** Cabbage.

00:54:00

**RF:** How do you do your cabbage?

00:54:01

**MB:** We smother our cabbage and basically because we're such a--you know a smaller spot and my ladies are timed, we--we smother our cabbage the day before. As you speak--as you and I are speaking now we're--we're--we're steaming a cabbage--cabbage for tomorrow, for a City Council meeting, so it's a day--it's like a day before prep. So basically, a lot of times we're prepping it when we're still serving customers. So cabbage emits kind of like a real strong, kind of, odor that people would think wow; what is that smell? But it's just basically we're kind of--we wash--we wash it and then we steam it. We cool it down and then we refrigerate it and then the next day we come back and we smother it. So it's never like a thing that we just kind of use it the same day. It has a day before process. And that's just the only item in this building that even the ladies will say, oh lord, the cabbage. It--you know and we try to hide it from like customers, you know, because--

00:55:08

**RF:** The smell of it?

00:55:10

**MB:** --the smell, uh-hm.

00:55:12

**RF:** How much cabbage will you be making for the City Council meeting tomorrow?

00:55:15

**MB:** Tomorrow--

00:55:16

**RF:** Or how much do you make at one time?

00:55:17

**MB:** Well tomorrow we'll--we'll do their meeting and it's for 25 people so it's not a large amount but it's just as--like I said, we're--we're sitting here now. I--I don't know if you smelled it but I smelled it. *[Laughs]*

00:55:34

**RF:** What do you smother it with; is it--is it with meat or without?

00:55:36

**MB:** Yeah; tomorrow we'll smother it with the meat. We will do like a bacon and sausage stock that we put in it and like some of the juices from the day before, the stock, we put in--in the actual cabbage and smother it down. Uh-hm; it's one of our items that a lot of people come for also, but now that we're into the Lenten season, on Wednesdays and Fridays we have seafood so we'll--every year we delete cabbage for six weeks.

**00:56:05**

**RF:** Why do you do it--oh because it has pork in it and it's a Wednesday dish you're saying.

**00:56:09**

**MB:** Uh-hm; yeah. And just we have so many people here that on Wednesdays and Fridays they don't eat meat, and that's been a tradition for Laura's for probably 30 years or more, that on Wednesday we do seafood. So we kind of shy away from our actual Wednesday menu for six weeks and we go to a Lenten menu.

**00:56:31**

**RF:** Okay; and what sort of seafood do you do during Lent?

**00:56:33**

**MB:** Hmm?

**00:56:35**

**RF:** What sort of seafood do you do during Lent?

00:56:36

**MB:** Catfish, fried shrimp; we'll do the crawfish and like a shrimp Creole, uh-hm.

00:56:46

**RF:** Okay; oh I have one question about the boudin because the Southern Foodways Alliance, we study boudin. Can you describe the boudin your grandmother used to make, maybe what-- what color it was, if it was ricey or very meaty?

00:57:03

**MB:** I--

00:57:03

**RF:** If you remember eating it.

00:57:04

**MB:** Oh my god; yes, I remember eating it. The boudin my grandmother made it was more of a pork--more of a meaty, and I know she used to buy the Boston butts, the Boston butts and I can remember the process like clockwork. She would boil them, grind them; she always had a different seasoning separate from actual--these actual, the rice, the meat, the stock and then the seasoning, so she kind of had like a four plan--four ingredient plan that all went into one--whoa, big bucket that was hand-tossed. **[Laughs]** Hand-tossed, and I remember that from as a child just it being hand-tossed.

00:58:00

**RF:** She would hand-toss it or you?

**00:58:02**

**MB:** Uh-hm; her or my grandfather, my dad, whoever was along to help. It was--it was an item that was hand-tossed and I mean all up to the elbows. It was tossed.

**00:58:15**

**RF:** Was it spicy?

**00:58:17**

**MB:** Spicy and then she had a--a very large meat grinder that she would kind of put the--the skin on like we call it--oh I can't call the name out of it, the skin--

**00:58:31**

**RF:** The casing?

**00:58:33**

**MB:** --the casing. The casing onto the little *boudinier*, she would say; she'd always call it a little *boudinier*. She would stick it onto that and she would stuff it out with a stuffer and usually my job and my brother's job, we--once they would link it we would kind of pour it--or like put it together and tie it into like big bundles. It almost looked like bananas. That's what I used to say. It looked like a banana, you know, bunch. But that's how she stuffed it. But the boudin was very, very meaty and more consistent--there was nothing else. There was no coloring in it like; I think if I would try to make it I'd make it with a little color you know. But there was no coloring; it

was just pork, rice, and her seasonings which was a broth, and a--like an onion--a Creole mixture of onion, bell peppers, onion tops. I remember that faithfully because that was her process of chopping all her stuff before and prepping her meats and stuff.

**00:59:40**

But I really, really wish that my brother and I would have paid attention to the whole process 'cause we've tried. I've tried and it's--I wouldn't sell it to anybody. **[Laughs]** And--and--and I think the problem is it's--also it's not the ingredients, it's the linking and the tying and the cutting and the art of that part. We just--I know I hadn't picked up--my son and I and my husband we've tried. We just can't get that part right.

**01:00:15**

The taste and the texture we could probably do. And like I said, fondly I remember all the ingredients. It's just the boudin, it's an art to it and my grandmother definitely had it down pat.

**01:00:29**

**RF:** Hmm; did your grandmother, did she speak French?

**01:00:34**

**MB:** Not as prevalent as my mom's family and my mother. My--my grandmother and my grandfather probably spoke to each other in French. But my mom put--and my grandmother and my grandfather could probably speak to each other, but my dad being here in Lafayette could not--. **[Interruption]**

**01:01:06**

My--my mom's family were more from like Parks area, which is a little more broken Creole, a lot more Creole. My grandmother spoke French but she could probably talk to my

grandfather and say, you know--they--they referred to each other, and 'til today we always wonder what did *nèg* [a Creole-speaking African American] mean, that they referred to each other as--go get that *nèg* you know and he would say oh *nèg*. They just--that's how they referred to each other as *nèg*.

**01:01:40**

My--my mom's family were the Creole speaking people.

**01:01:47**

**RF:** So your mom's family identified as Creole?

**01:01:51**

**MB:** Uh-hm.

**01:01:51**

**RF:** And did your father's family identify as Creole too? Did he--

**01:01:54**

**MB:** I think they did identify as Creole cooks. But to say coming from where my mom was from and which is probably like 17 miles away from here, this is the city compared to like where my mom is from. My mom is from a little town like a little past Breaux Bridge, you know in the middle of Breaux Bridge is St. Martinville, which is Parks, whereas I think Creole was the language of choice back in the day. You know so and my--my brother and I we were raised around my mom's family so I definitely picked up like the Creole language from my mom's side

of the family. My dad, he'd probably know what I'd be saying but he could not hold a whole conversation in Creole.

**01:02:41**

**RF:** Okay.

**01:02:42**

**MB:** From--and not picked it up from Miss Laura, no.

**01:02:47**

**RF:** Okay; it sounds like you're--you're encouraging your son to go into the restaurant business and continue--you know, be the fourth generation.

**01:02:56**

**MB:** That's right.

**01:02:56**

**RF:** What would you say to him now that you'd maybe want him to hear 10, 20 years from now?

**01:03:02**

**MB:** I would probably tell him to remain consistent and that's not only in our food base. That's just in our customer base and our--with vendors, just with--just everybody overall that you come across in this business. And I think that's really what kept us so consistent. Twenty years from

now I hope my kids will run the same operation as I ran because I think I ran the same operation as my mom and my grandmother.

**01:03:33**

I didn't come in as a more millennium-type young black woman. You know I came in as just--a lot of old school flavor as my grandmother, where we *cher-chered* [short for *chérie* and pronounced 'sha,' meaning dear or darling] everybody, you know, and if you came in and if you spoke French, we can speak French with you. You know even the people that I have here, the ladies that I have here, so it's really a down-home atmosphere. And I hope that Laura's III, IV, and V all have this same down-home flavor because definitely people used to--when I first opened here a lot of people came through and it was like, "Wow! We're just not used to like y'all new spot," you know, because of the fact that we have central air, we have central heat, we have a covered parking; at our old spot there was an air-condition in the window. There was probably no heater. The building was heated probably from what they were cooking right in the front. The parking if it rained you probably just had to go through like a gravel parking lot. So all those things I had to kind of, you know, I wanted to encourage--bring that here and keep it here, and I know with my kids, that I think it'll stay in years to come.

**01:04:56**

**RF:** Okay; good and if--if your grandmother Laura was here today if she could see you and your kids running this business, what do you think she would say?

**01:05:03**

**MB:** She'd say, "Job well done. Job well done--well done." Just because we were a small family; my grandmother prided herself on--on our little group, our small family. Her whole--her whole ways of thinking, even my mother, and I think she drilled into my mother was that everybody learned something out of here, 'cause she used to always say, "Y'all pay attention. You know pay attention. You know come here; come do this and come do that." And then down from when we were kids, my grandmother in our old spot, older--older spot, she raised chickens like they had chickens and she would she like tell us to pick the eggs, [*Laughs*] like go pick--you know pick through the eggs. And she would always say you know; "Never be too--too big to do something," you know too big to do a job or you know to get your hands dirty. So, I think that with the five of us as grandkids which two of us have passed away and the three of us have all ventured some kind of way in some form of cooking for and making somebody else happy, she would be happy. She would very well be pleased, uh-hm--and to generate like my kids. My brother has little kids; that--he has a 13 year old. They come here and they work so it's kind of like just the passing on, you know, and that's how I started from just being young, watching, going--them telling us. Go pick them tables up, you know. Go do this; go do that; go pick the eggs. Now--kids are different now; they want to come through 'cause they know at 13 people see them working. They get a little tip or two; you know, my little nieces and nephews, but they're also learning to come in, clean tables off, straighten--scrape plates and they're--and that's just the way my brother and I--all of us have learned, just starting from that bottom part, and owning up to you know a way of cooking.

**01:07:13**

**RF:** Okay; great. Well I want to thank you for this interview.

01:07:16

**MB:** Well good.

01:07:16

**RF:** If there is anything else you'd want to add?

01:07:17

**MB:** Come on down to Laura's.

01:07:20

**RF:** Okay; well thank you very much. This was great.

01:07:21

**MB:** Uh-hm; thank you. Well that was good Rien; that--.

01:07:24

**[End Madonna Broussard Interview]**