Marie Hebert
Arnaudville, LA

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Date: September 26, 2008
Location: Arnaudville, Louisiana
Interviewer: Sara Roahen, Southern Foodways Alliance
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 1 hour 35 minutes
Project: Southern Gumbo Trail – Louisiana

[Begin Marie Hebert Interview]

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Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Friday, September 26, 2008. I'm in Arnaudville, Louisiana, I think, with Miss Marie Hebert. Could I get you to say your name and your birth date?

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Marie Hebert: All right. Marie Hebert—H-e-b-e-r-t—and my birthday is August 17, 1957.

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SR: And we are in Arnaudville, is that right?

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MH: Yes, it's Arnaudville. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: Oh okay, great. So we--I'm here with Miss Marie—let me make sure this microphone is working—because she's canning some gumbo and—one second. All right; let's try this again. So you are making potato salad, if we hear any sounds in the background.

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MH: That's right. I'm chopping up my potatoes because we like ours kind of smashed a little bit. Some people like their potato salad in chunks but I like mine more smashed, so I--I chop it up. Now today on the stove we're going to have a gumbo. I'm making hen; we always use hen when we make gumbo instead of chicken because it--it doesn't fall apart as easy. Plus it has a stronger flavor, the juice has a stronger—so we always use a hen when we cook a gumbo. And I'm fixing my gumbo: hen, smoked sausage, andouille, and eggs. We put eggs in ours also.

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See, in the olden days when people first started making gumbo you make it—they would make it because it would stretch. You could feed a lot of people with just one chicken, you know. It fills a whole lot of bowls if you make it kind of soupy. Well in the olden days or—and even now, meat is well your most expensive ingredient. So in the olden days when people had their own chickens and their own animals you put eggs in the gumbo because it adds more protein and you can feed more people with it. So we--we go drop in an egg for everybody today just to get a taste. We'll have a little piece of hen, a little piece of sausage, and--and an egg in each bowl. And that's how I can it.

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When I can I try to—I cook my food, my gumbo, completely just as if I'm going to eat it right then, so that when I open the jar I don't have to re-cook it. It's ready to go on the spur of the moment and I put enough for two servings. One quart jar will feed two people, so when I fix the--a bowl today, like I said, we each are going to get a piece of a hen, a piece of sausage and an egg; so when I can it I put two pieces of chicken, two pieces of sausage. You see, that way it's two full meals

because a one-quart jar will--will produce two soup bowls of--of gumbo. So I go ahead and can it ready-to-serve. This way, if we're having gumbo one night, company shows up, whoop I just pull out another jar. If I need one more [serving], I get a pint. If I have two people show up I get a quart. And no one--no one knows that it was, you know, a surprise. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: Right.

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MH: So that works out real good for us. But like I said, most people when they think of canning, they--they think of canning preserves, jellies, fruits, jams. And also the people who have vegetable gardens, they think in terms of canning and putting up their green beans or their--their sweet peas, okra, or whatever. And when I grew up, people in my generation, our parents and grandparents, our mothers and grandmothers, always canned. Everybody canned, everybody. It wasn't

the novelty that it is today. It was just like washing dishes. Everybody--something everybody did, but nowadays, you know as we get more modernized and get further, further away from the old ways, if you want soup you go buy a can at the store you know. And sometimes it actually is more cost-effective to buy things that are already commercially canned because they can--they do it in such large quantities they can do it cheaper. But I choose not to do that because I like the idea of being able to pronounce all the ingredients that go in my food. You know, there's no chemicals, there's no preservatives, and let's be clear about this:

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Just like a can you buy—a can of soup or a can of beans that you buy at the grocery store—anything you can, like I'm going to show you today, the shelf life is the same as if you bought it commercially done. Just the other day when I did that workshop in--in Abbeville for Marcelle [Bienvenu], I brought a can of figs I had preserved seven years ago. And when I told them, *I canned these figs seven years ago*, you could see some of their eyes bulged out; they started getting nervous. So

I--I dumped the figs in a bowl and I said pass me a fork, so I ate one first. Well when it didn't kill me, everybody wanted to sample it, you know. And the truth is we were canning figs that day, so we had fresh figs we were canning on the stove and we had a can that I had done--a jar that I had canned seven years earlier that tasted the same. They looked the same; the consistency's the same. As long as the seal is not broken, as the canning process has not been, you know, interfered with, the shelf life is good.

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I've eaten—we always—we rotate our stock, you know. We eat the older stuff first just--just to be safe, but the truth is I'd say about a--maybe a month ago I opened a can of figs that had been canned by my mother 10 years ago, 1998, and they were fine. **[*Laughs*]** It's, you know, people don't--people don't realize when you go to the store and you buy a can of beans off the shelf or whatever, they don't stop to think, *Long before that can ever made it to the shelf it was sitting in a warehouse somewhere*. And don't think that they make that stuff fresh every day and ship it out. No, it could sit in the warehouse for two, three, four, five

years, and then it gets transported in 18-wheelers that are--are hot and not refrigerated, you know. Then the stores—like big box stores like Wal-Mart or whatever—it stays in their warehouse for a year or two, so I mean it's not as fresh as people think. But just like the canning I'm doing today, as long as the canning has not been compromised, the canning process, the food—the shelf life is great.

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Like those figs that I canned the other--for the workshop, you know, they say, *Oh it's so much trouble*, and it is. It is a lot of trouble, and you'll see today it's--it's hard work, it's long work, but it's rewarding when you step back and you look. It's a beautiful presentation in the jars and stuff, but as opposed to, let's say, freezing. Why don't--why don't we just freeze our gumbo? Well, first of all, there is no food—no meat, no fish—that you can keep in your freezer for seven years. That--it would not be good anymore. But those figs and some of the--you know, some of the jambalaya and other things that I've canned before, you can keep them for seven--ten years despite—. You know it

sounds--it sounds scary, but like I said, the cans you buy in the store, their--their shelf life is long, too.

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So one reason why I can is because you can keep it for so long; it never gets freezer burnt. It doesn't dry out. As long as that can--jar is sealed, the food is the exact same as if I had just cooked it that morning on the stove.

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What got me interested in canning out here was I never lived this much out in the country before. And I always had an interest in canning, you know, preserves and jams and jellies because I love to eat, but when I moved out here, I faced a dilemma that I had never had before in other places that I had lived. And that is, for some reason out here in the rural countryside parishes they just randomly turn off our electricity like twice a week—or our water. Some days you'll be doing housework and you'll go to turn on the faucet and, *Oops, we don't have water*. They just without warning randomly shut off utilities and stuff out here in the country. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: Why is that?

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MH: Well I don't know. I've called to ask for a rational explanation and mostly all I get is stuttering, but I--I think—I'm going to speculate here because I'm not a lineman—but I think they do it because if one person builds a house and moves in a trailer, maybe they have to shut down everybody to hook up. I don't know. But there is no schedule or rhyme or reason to it.

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So you--you know we've lost food in the past, and as I said, when Hurricane Katrina hit, it just so happens that hurricane season falls right at shrimp season. And there is no Cajun that is not going to go out and get their shrimp. Well just like everybody else, we had bought two ice chests, about 100-pounds, of fresh shrimp. And I had just de-headed all that, cleaned it, and froze it when Katrina hit and we lost an entire

freezer of shrimp I had just bought. And we could not afford to replace it, so that was the final straw. I said, Fine. I--if I can can fruits, if I can can vegetables, I bet I can can food—entrées. So that's what got me interested in--in researching and canning: how to can beyond just the traditional things and--and do gumbo, jambalaya, spaghetti, different things. I'll show you some of the things that I can.

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MH: Yeah.

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SR: But that's how I got interested out here. It was more like necessity. I--I read a little saying one time and it said, *Women are like teabags. You never know their strength until they're in hot water*. And that's basically the story behind my canning. There's nothing like losing a whole freezer worth of shrimp to start getting those creative juices flowing—*I'm going to find a way; I'm not losing any more food*. So we have a lot of food put up in--in canning.

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And truthfully, my schedule and stuff, you know sometimes I work; we're going back and forth doing errands and things. Sometimes you come and lay—you just don't feel like cooking. I can--over here [***motions toward her shelves of canned goods***], take a can opener, pop open a jar, and in 10 minutes here is a home-cooked meal, you know. And like I said, I know what's in it because I'm the one who cooked it. There's no preservatives and there's no chemicals; there's nothing artificial about it. It's just regular old food. So those are some of the reasons why I can, but mostly, like I said, because it—necessity required me to come up with some kind of way to keep our food going.

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SR: Yeah, so that's interesting to me. So you just starting doing this like maybe three years ago?

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MH: Oh no, I'm going to say it's more like, maybe eight or nine years ago I've been canning. I've been canning for a long time. What has changed is I'm starting to get braver and I'm starting to try new things you know. I did try one time, let me just say that I did try one time canning my gumbo already made with the eggs in it and I felt just like when you buy pickled eggs at the grocery store. Once they've been canned and processed, to me they get a little rubbery, so I choose not to--to can the eggs. When I heat up my gumbo, if I want eggs or if I need more meat, you know in there, then I'll drop the eggs in when I go to heat it up, but—. So I've been canning, like I said, for many years now, but I'm just trying to stretch the limits just to see how far--how far I can push it. And it's really—it's a safe thing to experiment with because you know before you ever taste it; you don't have to find out the hard way whether or not it was successful. There are signs that you can tell when you look at a jar whether it's been contaminated, where there is, you know, maybe bacteria or something growing in there. So you can visually observe the jar and you have a clue pretty--right off the bat whether or not it's safe to eat. So I try different things.

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I--I have some lemon trees here in the yard and my favorite pie is lemon meringue pie. And I also decorate cakes and stuff for people, so I make a lot of lemon filling, you know. So to save time, I thought, *Well I save time canning gumbo, spaghetti, whatever; I wonder if I could save time canning my own pie filling*, because you can buy pie filling in the store. So I tried that, but it was not successful. What happened was it--the liquid part separated, so that didn't work out. But like I'm saying, you can look at a jar and tell that, *No, it didn't quite work out this time. I either have to tweak my recipe or just, you know, forget about it*. So long before you taste it you can tell whether or not—.

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So you may be wondering, *Well, when I buy lemon pie filling at the grocery store, it'—the consistency is still there*. Well that—read the ingredients, you know. My lemon pie filling has fresh squeezed lemons, juice and pulp, sugar, and cornstarch. You know, theirs has lemon juice, sugar, cornstarch, and a whole list of other things that I can't even

pronounce, so it's not always real **[*Laughs*]**. But so that's what I'm saying.

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What I have done the last few years is try to reach out and stretch myself and find out—now it's just out of curiosity—what else can I can and get away with, you know? But I've tried some unusual recipes. Like everybody has heard of grape jam, grape jelly; you buy that in the store all the time. So I found a recipe in an old, old cookbook. That's the only place you're going to find any of these recipes, in the old cookbook, because nowadays these young people, they really think [for] macaroni and cheese you start off with a box, a blue box. And that's not real **[*Laughs*]**. You know I don't know how to--how to break it to them, but Honey, that ain't real. But anyway, so—or like these young cooks today like my son and daughter-in-law. [They said] *Oh yes, I--I had—we made a vegetable soup.* Well that's that Campbell's stuff you put in the microwave and you pour it out in a glass and people think it's soup. And oh my God. **[*Laughs*]** I'm scared to eat at young people's houses; you don't know what they—what did you put in there?

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But anyway I don't know how I got off on the tangent.

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SR: You found some—you were talking about grape—.

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MH: Oh, yes. In an old, old cookbook I found a recipe for grape preserves, where—I must see if I can find a jar—where you--just like figs or strawberries, where you leave the grapes whole and they simmer in their own juices, and so they're great like to put over pancakes or waffles or--or biscuits or whatever. So now I'm at the point where I--I like to experiment with different things because I do grow my own grapes. I have my own—a grapefruit tree; kumquats. I make marmalade. I have lemon trees. So just like in the olden days when people had so much--so many snap beans, so much okra, so much vegetables out of the garden, they had to find stuff to do with it, I find myself in that situation today. I have all these fruits; you can only eat so many. What do you do

with it? You give some away but you still need to do something, so you find ways to preserve them and put them up so that nothing goes to waste. I--I don't believe in wasting food.

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SR: No, that's great. What are—I'll follow you. She's cutting up some eggs for the potato salad. When you--when you talk about putting eggs in the gumbo, you mean hard-boiled eggs right?

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MH: Well there's two ways that people put eggs in their gumbo when you go places. Some people boil the eggs, hard-boiled eggs like what you said, and then crack them and put them in the gumbo to help—because it absorbs some of the gumbo flavor. Other people who are more adept at it than me crack the eggs, the raw eggs, directly into the gumbo and let them boil in there. But every time I've tried that they always break apart and—. So just for appearances I go ahead and—but I

am going to try it again today in front of you. I'm going to experiment on you if you don't mind. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: No. So people are successful at kind of keeping them whole once they crack them in there?

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MH: Yes. My [friend] gets—she's an expert at it. I have never been able to do it. I--they'll take an egg and, you know, crack them on the side of the pot and then just pull it apart and it will fall right in there and it draws together; it coagulates. And it comes out in one solid mass. I've never been able to do it, but I'm going to try it again today **[*Laughs*]**.

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SR: All right.

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MH: So when I serve the gumbo, if you can't find your egg just know that it's in there somewhere. It just may not be whole. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: Okay. What would some of the other signs be that you would see that would make you not want to eat something that had been canned?

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MH: Hmm. Well one thing, the telltale sign is the lid will not be flat. When you--when you get these lids, when you buy a jar, a box—here's a case of--of jars. I'm going to open a fresh case in front of you. The cases come with a jar, the lid, and the band. The lid is the flat part that actually creates the suction to can it, and the band is that ring that you screw around the top. When you buy a fresh case of canning jars, all the parts come in with it. But over time after you've eaten the stuff out of the jar, you cannot use the lid again. Okay, so you--you can buy a box of lids separately.

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So when you buy the lids, a new pack of lids—oops! there's a little bump in the middle and you can hear the popping sound it makes when you press it. All right, this little bump, they call it a dome, this little dome on the lid. When your jar is canned properly, that means all the air has been sucked out of it, just like if you suck through a straw, it pulls all the air or liquid out of a container. When you can this jar, all the air that's in here—you see because air--contact with air is what causes your food to spoil. That's why we refrigerate things or we buy things freeze-dried or we put them in the freezer, because contact with air is what spoils your food. So that's why they tell you when you go to the grocery store, you don't buy a--a can that has a dent in it. Well the truth is you can buy a can with a dent in it; that's--that's a generalization. What you have to be careful of is that—because where's it dented there's--there's not a cut or a crack because you know—well I don't know what kind of driver you are, but I've bumped into many things in my car before **[*Laughs*]** and if it makes a little dent in your car, that's not going to rust. It only rusts if it makes a crack and the paint has been, you know, scratched through.

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Well same thing here on the --on the lids—on the can, I mean. If there's just a--a dent in the can it may still be good. But if it's a sharp crease and there's a--a cut in it where air could get inside, then the food is spoiled. So the same thing here in--in the canning process that we're doing. You want all the air to be sucked out of this jar. When it's sucked out, this dome will suck down, okay, and it'll--it'll be concave. As long as it's concave—see I'm pressing--let me show you one that's already--that's already canned.

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SR: Yeah.

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MH: Let's see…How about—well, here's some grapes. Let's open a jar of grapes. Okay, let me show you here. I'll just put it here for a second. See, and you can press—you see when I pressed it?

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SR: Oh yeah. It's totally stiff.

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MH: Yes, it's completely stiff and there's a slight indention. If you put some water in here, there's a slight indention because it has been sucked down because there's no air left in here. Well if your canning process has been compromised, before you ever test it out on anybody you can tell because that lid will pop back up. And if you hear that popping sound then your lid has not sealed properly. The food is probably not safe to eat. So you always test your lid first before you--you do it.

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Another—there's several things that could explain why your canning process didn't work, and as we go through the canning process I'll show you some of those things. But in answer to your question, *How can you tell just by looking*, well number one, you test the lid and make sure there's no popping sound. Then you look real close at the product, the food that's actually in the jar. You know we've all—from science

class you remember some of those pictures you've seen with the microscope. You know if you see any of that stuff growing on the inside, well don't eat it **[*Laughs*]**. Okay, that is a sure sign something is wrong with this picture. Don't--don't eat it if it has signs of mold or spore growth or--or whatever.

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Another thing to look for is serious discoloration because, again, if air was able to just get underneath that lid just a little bit, over time the food will get darker and darker and darker. So if you see your beautiful white pears starting to look kind of greenish or grayish, well that means air was--got inside and this particular jar then would not be--would not be safe to eat.

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SR: Does that happen to you very often? Like how often does it happen that you have a compromised can?

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MH: It doesn't happen to me very often at all, especially now. Here's what you have to be careful of. When I first started canning—. First of all let me just say this. When you do traditional canning that is pickles, jellies, jams or whatever, there's three main natural preservatives: sugar, salt, vinegar. If you put enough sugar, the product will stay good even if a little air does touch it. Pickles, there's so much vinegar and so in pickles that's a natural preservative; you know it's a chemical preservative. It's a natural preservative. There's enough in there that even if your lid pops, there's—the pickles will probably still preserve on the inside. So I forgot your question. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: Just how often that happened to you.

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MH: Oh yes. So number one, with pickles and stuff like that it hardly ever happens because there is so much natural preservative already in it. You have to be careful, though, when you're canning stuff like gumbo.

Gumbo doesn't have sugar, vinegar, a lot of salt in it, so you have to be careful. When I first started canning entrées I would go to the discount stores to buy my cases of canning jars because it was cheaper. And glass can be sterilized so you can use it over and over and over. But the mistake I was making was using the lids that came with the jars.

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You know just like anything else—anything rubberized or--or whatever—over time they dry out and they crack or whatever. So when I was using the old lids that came with the old jars they were popping loose, you know, more often. So what I do now is, when I open a--a case of jars—I don't care if I buy it brand new—I always buy a separate pack of canning lids, fresh canning lids, and now it only happens like maybe once in every maybe 30 or 40 jars of--of stuff that I can. And the reason why in my case it happens, is because in the pressure canner the way you sterilize the jar and push the air out of the jar is you have to build the--the pressure in the canner up so high that it pushes the--the air out. Well sometimes if there's a thin piece of onion as the canner is pushing stuff inside of the jar out of the jar—if a little slither of onion or

something or the skin of a bean gets on the lip, that one little thing will stop it from canning—from sealing properly, I mean. So that's the only trouble I have; not that it's any problem with the canning process. But when I see that happen, I say, *Oh this one didn't seal; no problem. Guess what we're eating today?* We just eat it. You know you can eat it right—or if we're sick of eating it, then I just put in the refrigerator. You know as long as it's in the refrigerator and eat it, it will be fine. Go ahead and sit down, Baby.

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SR: Oh no, no. That's okay. How did you figure that out with the lids?

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MH: Trial and error. It's just like--it's just like the teabag thing. When I realized something is not right: *Now I know how to can. What is wrong?* So you start going through the steps and that's when I--I figured it out, through trial and error. I knew there wasn't a problem with the jar. You always run your finger along the mouth of the jar to make sure there's

no nicks and chips in it. You know how sometimes on a drinking glass you'll have a chip? Well that little chip, it--the lid will not lie flat on the jar if there's a chip in it. That's how air can get inside. So number one, I knew my jars were okay because there was no cracks or chips in them. I knew the jars could be sterilized. Through a matter of elimination I figured out it was: it was the lids.

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SR: Huh, that's really interesting. That is like the teabag thing.

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MH: [*Laughs*] All right, I'm going to go ahead and get this set up with the canning process.

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SR: Okay, I'm going—I'll pause this and take some pictures for a while.

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So--so we're at a waiting point because you put the canning pot on the stove, huh?

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MH: And some water and I was heating up the water inside. And what I'm saying about the water is when—unlike water-bath canning, where you just have to submerge your jar of preserves or pickles for a few minutes—in the water-bath canning you need a lot of water to be able to submerse a jar. But in pressure canning you do not want a lot of water. You only put like three inches of water in the bottom of your pot. So your jars will be sticking up over the pot. You see, because we--we don't want water to seep in what we're pushing out, and you need--you need the extra—you only put about three inches in there and your--your manual will tell you that. So only put about three inches of water, but it needs to be boiling water. You cannot take hot gumbo and put it in a--a cold water pot because it will crack the jar. So you have to put hot gumbo in a hot pressure canner.

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Now when I canned that meat raw, what I did was I had boiled—

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SR: Let me interrupt you for a minute. You're talking about, we were talking earlier when I had the [recorder] off that you can some brisket meat. So that's what you're talking about?

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MH: Yes, yes. When I had canned the brisket meat raw, I just wanted to hurry up and just put it up so I wouldn't lose it. I put--I cut raw brisket meat and put some spices in the jar—you know, onions, cayenne peppers, and hot water. I put hot water in a hot sterilized jar and then it went into the hot pressure canner. You never put a cold jar in the hot canner. So since my gumbo has—it's already cooked and it's just simmering there, I'm bringing my--the water in the pressure canner up to a boil. And then once it comes to a boil we simply will just fill the jars—like I told you how much meat you want to put in each jar—we're going to fill the jars. Put on the lids, screw the bands, and we're just

going to slow--set them in there and the pressure canner does all the work.

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Once you set them in the pressure canner, though, the reason why you have to sit here—here's--here's the part that's long and hard. It sounds real simple: just put food in a jar **[*Laughs*]**. But what--what makes it, canning, unattractive to some people is that you do have to sit here and watch it because that needle, the gauge on the--on the pressure dial, if it gets too high your canner can explode. You see—have you ever had that happen to you?

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SR: No, but I've heard about it.

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MH: Well [my friend] can tell you some horror stories where she was just married, poor darling. She had to get married and learn how to cook all at the same time, and that's just too much for one--for one individual

to have to **[*Laughs*]** —you know that's just too much change of life at one time. But poor darling, she was trying to do a pressure canning meal and it exploded. And even though the covers are latched on—I mean they are locked on—the pressure can build up so high, the cover shot--exploded off of the pot and shot up into the ceiling and got stuck in the ceiling. They had to come and pry the cover out of the ceiling. Poor darling.

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So it's very important, when they tell you—. Well it's just like any lawnmower. You know even a lawnmower comes with a list of cautions. *Don't stick your hand in the--in front of a moving blade*. I mean, you know, come on. It's almost kind of silly but every instruction is important, and when you get your--your pressure canner, read the manual because it can be fun, it can be easy, but if--if you don't be careful it can be dangerous. So here's the part that's unattractive to people about canning: the amount of time it takes, and you have to watch that needle. If it gets too far above the designated pressure that you're supposed to hold, you can—the jars—I've had that happen. I've

had a—when I was cooking, doing jelly one time, the jars explode inside the jar and then you have glass shattered everywhere. When my friend, when the cover shot of hers, not only was the cover in the ceiling but the contents—she had--poor thing, she had babies—glass, it was like an explosion of glass and food in her kitchen. So you have to be careful, so that's why you sit here and you watch the pressure canner.

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So many times when I'm canning I just pull the chair and sit right here in front of the stove and I just eat and watch. It's the most boring movie you'll ever sit and watch in your entire life **[*Laughs*]**, but just like any roux art form, the glory of it, the--the beauty of it is in the finished product. So if you're prone to--to canning, then you can appreciate just seeing something that you created and something you did, you know, lined up there. And let's be honest, this makes great gifts for newlyweds.

00:30:03

My little godchild, poor darling, she needed a cookbook to make toast. You know what I mean. And I love her to death but young people today just don't learn how to cook from scratch, you know, like my

generation and--and other people have, or have been fortunate enough to have. So what I do sometimes, like if I--if I know the person well enough—because there is no gift that says, *Hey I really love you--I care about you* than something you actually make with your own hands and heart. So like when she gets married or whatever, I got her a case. It had gumbo, spaghetti, jambalaya, all kinds of foods. It was a newlywed survival kit. So **[*Laughs*]** the--the food comes in handy. And you know at our Master Gardener meetings we've had speakers come from other parts of the State or whatever. As--as gifts, I've donated jars of preserves and things and people enjoy receiving things that are homemade.

00:31:04

SR: That's true.

00:31:04

MH: How the old saying goes, *What is old is new again*. You know if someone gave my mother, for example, or my grandmother a jar of figs, they--they'd probably think, *Well what do I want with that? I can make*

my own. But nowadays it truly is an art form, just like hand-sewing or French-sewing, you know, or any—canning, quilting—any of the other art forms. It's become more of an art form today, but in--like I say, in our case in rural parishes it still is part of surviving. To us it's not a novelty; it's a necessity. But to people like in the outside—in the real world, in the modern world **[*Laughs*]** —

00:31:38

SR: Like me?

00:31:40

MH: —yeah. It's--it's--people like receiving things that are--that have been homemade and home-done. So let me check here on my water.

00:31:45

SR: Okay.

00:31:48

MH: Not yet.

00:31:50

SR: It's interesting to me—so when--when I had the recorder off for a while, you told me that you taught art.

00:31:57

MH: Yeah.

00:31:59

SR: And you see this as an art. There must be some connection. Like you—like how they look when they come out?

00:32:04

MH: Yes. You know as an artist myself, I own very few of my own drawings and paintings. Most of them I've given away to people that I—my family members or people that I love or whatever. What an artist is drawn to do is express themselves; it's in the expressing, in the doing,

that you say who you are or--or you put yourself out there to the world. The finished product is what you can give away or sell or live off of or whatever, but the true artistic action, the creative--the creativity happens in the doing, and so even though the finished product is beautiful or meaningful to behold, that's how it is kind of with canning. I also--I'm a hand-quilter, the old-time quilt, like my grandmother used to do. People today don't quilt either. You know one person can only use so many quilts. But it is the act of quilting, of creating something—it's a creative process of making something, taking something plain, ordinary, and making it extraordinary or bringing out—. That's my cat.

00:33:20

SR: Oh.

00:33:22

MH: Yeah, she's the one that has multiple personalities. **[*Laughs*]** It's--it's true, poor darling. Sometimes we walk in the room and she'll be

facing the wall and just sitting there like she's punished and I'm, *What do you think she's looking at?* I don't know **[*Laughs*]**; poor thing.

00:33:38

SR: Yeah, I think she hallucinates. But, for example, like I don't think she sees you yet.

00:33:44

MH: Really?

00:33:44

SR: She's pretty.

00:33:44

MH: **[*Laughs*]** But--and her name is Ariel.

00:33:46

SR: Ariel?

00:33:46

MH: Yeah. But anyway, so to me the connection between canning and art is, it is a process of taking something ordinary, and making it extra--turning it into something that is beautiful yet functional. And you got--you know you've got to put yourself into it because everybody's recipe is different. My gumbo, of all the people you've interviewed, my gumbo is not going to taste like anybody's. Everybody's gumbo tastes different. So when I can this, when I package this, I'm saying, *This is me*. I'm giving a part of myself, I put myself—it was my sweat, my idea, my recipe, my process. It's a part of yourself you're giving to the world just as if I had done a painting or just as if I had done a quilt or--or what have you. So to me that's the connection between canning and—.

00:34:32

And like I said, it started off as a necessity because I do need to eat. I kind of got—I got accustomed to eating and I don't want to stop eating now. **[*Laughs*]** I got--I kind of like it, you know. But once I got the necessity part over with, like I said, experimenting with different

recipes and things, now it's become that I feel comfortable doing it. Now that I'm not scared of the canner anymore, now I look upon it as-- as an art process. So let me check and see if the water is ready.

00:34:55

SR: Okay, yeah.

00:34:59

MH: Actually it's getting there, so I'm going to go ahead and start putting some—.

00:35:11

SR: Putting some gumbo in jars?

00:35:11

MH: Yeah. What we're going to do is we're going to fill up the canner. I'm sure you're going to want to take a picture of my—.

00:35:17

SR: Yeah, I'm going to turn this off again and take some pictures.

00:35:21

MH: In fact, you might want to take a picture from this side because with the dark door in the background you can see the steam, if you needed one of that.

00:35:26

SR: Okay.

00:35:28

MH: You see how the steam is coming out? It's white, okay, and so what I was saying was, *Just like the Vatican*. You can tell when they elect the Pope by the color of the smoke they send up. Well it's the same thing with the pressure canner. You can tell from the color of the smoke, of the steam coming out, what's going on inside the pressure canner. As long as the steam is--is escaping in a white color, that means you still

have air and moisture escaping as the--escaping from the pot through the ventilation system there. Once the steam turns clear, that means there is no more air in the pot and that's when you put this little cap on the vent and it prevents more--more steam from escaping. Once the steam can no longer escape, once the steam is trapped inside the pot, that's when the pressure starts building. And that's how we can under pressure. If you put the lid on too soon, if you put the cap on too soon and you trap too much air and moisture in the pot, well then your--your canner could explode or the--the emergency valve, which you always pray works, you may have an opportunity to see it in action **[*Laughs*]**. But so you do—as long as that steam is white you can watch it. It's better to be safe than sorry. You know if we're going to be here an hour and a half canning gumbo, what's waiting two or three minutes for the steam, you know in the total scheme of things? So we're going to watch the steam and wait until it changes from a white smoke to almost clear.

00:37:01

You see how it's coming out in puffs?

00:37:03

SR: Yeah.

00:37:04

MH: Okay, it looks like it's coming out in puffs but what's actually happening is some of it's white but it's starting to turn clear because the water is constantly boiling. It doesn't boil then stop and then boil then stop. So it's--it appears to the naked eye that it's coming out in puffs of white smoke but what's actually happening is the white smoke is intermittently coming out between clear steam. You can see how it—clear, see clear—clear?

00:37:28

SR: Yeah, maybe I should try to take a photo then.

00:37:29

MH: Okay.

00:37:30

SR: Could you hold this for one second?

00:37:30

MH: Yes, ma'am.

00:37:31

SR: Could you—I can hold this but could you just tell me while I'm doing this, okay so we've gotten the gumbo in the cans.

00:37:38

MH: Yeah, we got the gumbo in the jars. And we've lowered the jars into the boiling water that was there in the pot. And then we put the lid on our canner. And what we're doing now is we're letting the water come to a boil once more. Come on this side, Baby. It's a lot easier because the dark--the door in the background, you can see the smoke.

00:38:03

SR: Ah, you're right. Thank you.

00:38:05

MH: So as the water inside the pot is boiling, of course you can see the steam escaping, and once the steam becomes more clear than--than not it's safe to put the cap on it.

00:38:20

SR: And then--and then what?

00:38:21

MH: Then once--once we put the cap on it—we'll put this cap on there. Once we put the cap on there, that means the steam cannot escape anymore so what's going to happen is the pressure that's inside the canner will start to build up. Okay, I think it's ready. Good, just put it on.

00:38:42

Now you see this little knob? He's--he's kind of fluttering a little bit here because there is not that much air left. You're going to see; it's going to bounce; it's going to pop straight up when there is no more air. See it starting to spit? Okay, it's spitting a little bit because it wants to pop up, but there might be just a little bit a fraction, a little bit of steam left in the pot, so it's--it's coming out along the sides. That button will tell you when your canner is safe to go onto the next step.

00:39:23

SR: Okay, and then, so can you tell me again what pressure you're going to get this to and why?

00:39:27

MH: Oh yes. We're going to be canning our gumbo just like you would any entrée that is fully cooked at 11-pounds pressure. When you're canning raw meat in a pressure canner—because that's the only way--the only way you can preserve meat is in a pressure canner—. You can, like I say, do jams and jellies either in a water-bath or for a very short

time in a pressure canner. You have an option there, but when you're cooking meat or beans—vegetables—you have no choice. You cannot use the boil--you can only use the pressure canner method.

00:40:00

If your meat is raw, you want the dial to get up to 11-pounds pressure and you have to hold it at 11-pounds pressure and not let it waiver. If, as in our case here with the gumbo, I'm canning my gumbo fully cooked and ready to eat. If the meat is already cooked, then you bring the pressure up to 10-pounds pressure and you hold it there, so it's a designated amount of time. I'm canning in quarts, so a quart of gumbo you would process at 10-pounds pressure for an hour and a half. It has to stay in the canner—you see there it went up.

00:40:32

SR: Oh yeah, it popped up.

00:40:33

MH: It has to stay in the canner with the dial at 10-pounds for an hour and a half. If you're canning an entrée, meat, or vegetables in a pint jar, then you only have to keep it in the pressure canner for, let's say, 50 minutes. Something like that. But a quart, because there's more to it, there's more product, it takes a little bit longer, so it takes an hour and a half. So we're going to be here for an hour and a half. Now that the--the cap is on, no more steam can escape. The button is up; that tells me there's no more air inside. The only thing left inside there is three inches of water, six jars of gumbo. There's no air; there's no steam; there's no--there's no, nothing in there. The pressure is starting to build up and you're going to slowly see this dial, as the pressure gets higher and higher in this canner, you're going to see the dial move up. And when it hits—when it touches the tin, that--that means there's 10-pounds of pressure inside this canner; then you adjust your heat source.

00:41:35

It--if it gets too high, then I'm going to lower the heat on the stove. That will bring it back down. That lowers the pressure. But as long as—you want to do it as quickly as possible, so I leave the stove on full blast

until it reaches the 10-pounds that I need. Once it reaches the 10-pounds, then I can adjust my knob, my heat source, so that it stays where--where I want it.

00:41:58

SR: Okay, great.

00:42:00

MH: All right, I say let's fix us a bowl.

00:42:01

SR: Okay. **[*Laughs*]**

00:42:03

MH: Are you asking how I cook mine?

00:42:06

SR: Yeah. I just wanted to—. We're back; we've eaten gumbo; Miss Marie is cleaning up; it was delicious.

00:42:11

MH: Okay, great.

00:42:13

SR: So I wanted to just ask you about the gumbo itself a little bit.

00:42:17

MH: All right. Well let me tell you how I fix mine. Let's sit down there with our coffee.

00:42:21

SR: Okay. Yeah, we've got some coffee and some banana nut bread. Did you make the bread?

00:42:26

MH: Yes, I did. Eating is a Cajun way of life but it—you've never finished until you've had dessert and coffee.

00:42:32

SR: I appreciate that. **[*Laughs*]**

00:42:33

MH: **[*Laughs*]** Actually the banana nut bread that we're having here is part of my Hurricane Preparedness Box. They always tell people before a storm, you know you get the evacuation box ready. All right, for most people that means bottled water, Band-Aids, diapers. For me it's food **[*Laughs*]**, so right before a hurricane I always fix banana nut bread, pumpkin bread, fig bread. I bake different breads so that when the electricity goes out—see we have a gas stove; you can light it with a--with a match. So this way I can still grill bread and we still eat relatively well even in the middle of a hurricane.

00:43:08

Well, for my gumbo here's what I do, and everybody has their own system and their own style. And one thing I've noticed is as Cajun becomes more commercialized—it's becoming more commercialized; a lot of these restaurants that you go to are these purportedly Cajun chefs you see on TV on all these cooking shows. I think they sometimes kind of elaborate and dish out what they think the public wants to hear. But the truth is, authentic Cajun cooking is really just about simplicity. Keep it simple, keep it heavy, and find a way to stretch it. You want to fill up a lot of people **[*Laughs*]**, you know, at--at one time, and that's the basic-style cooking.

00:43:56

So we don't—the truth is real Cajuns don't cook with a lot of wine and all this stuff that you see a lot on TV. So my supplies, my ingredients, are very simple. I cook my roux. I dissolve my roux in boiling water, simmering water, for two hours before I ever put any meat in it. And I do that because roux, just like anything else that you mix in with water, as it starts to dissolve it breaks into small particles and granules. And the truth is while you're cooking your roux, you can dip a

spoon in there and you can see little brown specks floating in the water. Well that's the roux breaking up. **[*Dog Barking*]**

00:44:33

Now roux that is almost cooked and roux that is completely cooked have two different flavors. There are some people who have stomachs a lot stronger than mine that like kind of a bitter bite to it. Well those rouxs you would not cook as much because, just like any food that you cook, the longer you cook it the more it starts to--to fall apart—meat or anything else. And so the more you cook it the more mellow each bite gets because its flavor and juices have been dissipated, you know, throughout the whole pot. So if you like that bitter taste you wouldn't cook your roux as much. But I don't. I like mine very smooth, so I cook my roux in water for two hours before I ever do anything. That way I know it is solid brown and you don't see any specks in it or whatever.

00:45:20

SR: Let me--let me just stop at that. So are you—do you mean that you make your roux?

00:45:26

MH: Well what I do is—because I use roux a lot. I like fricassees, stews; I like all that. I make my own rice dressing stock. I do all that. So about once a year, and it's usually around September—it's right before hurricane season and right before we get any cold snaps—I make roux galore. I make jars and jars of roux. You can keep roux in the refrigerator, believe it or not, even longer than you keep canned goods. **[*Laughs*]** It will stay—it will keep forever. I've--roux does not go bad. It's just like flour. Flour doesn't go bad, you know.

00:45:58

But anyway, so I do make my own roux because, for the same reason I don't like to buy anything else, I like to make mine like I want it made. The darker you make roux, the--the more you cook it, the darker it gets, the more—to me it has that bitter bite to it, which I don't care for. So I like mine the color more of chocolate.

00:46:21

SR: Which kind of chocolate?

00:46:23

MH: Milk chocolate. I like milk chocolate. Some people like the dark chocolate, but I find that a little--a little bitter. So I like my roux milk-chocolate-colored. So I always keep it in the refrigerator in a glass jar. And whenever I'm getting ready to cook I just go in there. I dig out a spoon of it and put it in my dish.

00:46:41

Now when people buy roux in--in the store, or when they see me taking the roux out of my refrigerator, if--if you're not accustomed to it, it may kind of catch you off-guard at first because there is about an inch layer or so of grease on top of the roux. And that's not an accident; that's there on purpose because just like it—it seals the roux. Remember we talked about in canning? If air touches the food it starts to spoil. Okay, well if air touches the roux it does start to kind of dry out, so the way you stop the air from touching the roux is you pour oil—or I--you cook with extra oil or you can pour oil on top of the roux and it seals the

roux so that it always stays moist. It's the same theory as when you put suntan lotion on; it keeps your skin moist and stops it from drying out. So you always have a layer on top of your roux whether you make it at home or buy it at the store. That's going to be standard.

00:47:34

So anyway, so yeah, I make my own roux and then I—another good thing about cooking it so long before you actually start assembling your gumbo is, if you put your meat in and put everything in there and start cooking it all at one time, sometimes as the roux starts to dissolve, specks of the roux attach to pieces of meat, and I--I just don't like the way that looks and I want it thoroughly cooked. So I don't let it attach to anything. So I cook it for two hours because I don't want it to attach to anything and I want it completely dissolved. And another thing is, you know if you--if you make--if you put too much and your gumbo comes out too thick, more like a stew, you can always add a little more water and get it thinner. But if you didn't put enough roux and it's time to eat and your gumbo basically looks like a--a bowl of tea, you cannot go back and add roux, because it takes so long for the roux to cook that

your meat would disintegrate by the time the roux cooked. So by cooking mine two hours to start off, every now and then I can get my spoon, I can dip it in, and I can see what color chocolate is my roux. If--and it's the spoon test. I'm sure you've heard about it; everybody I know, this is how you tell the gumbo. You don't want to see the spoon. When you put your spoon in your bowl of gumbo, if you can see the spoon then your gumbo is too thin. So when I dip my—when I'm testing it out, I dip my spoon in there. If I can see that--the silver spoon in the bottom, it's too thin. Put more roux. It's good when you can't see the spoon. That's how much—. Come on in. **[*Laughs*]** We're not on TV or anything. **[*Interruption*]**

00:49:14

SR: I haven't heard the spoon test. I like that, though.

00:49:22

MH: Oh well that's how I grew up telling about it. Or when you go to someone else's house—we used to do this with my aunt all the time

because her husband did the cooking and we weren't too sure. So we all, when we'd get there to her house—she has us over every--every Christmas to open presents and they always make a gumbo. Well her husband makes the gumbo and sometimes it's kind of off. So when you walk in the house, the first thing you do is you ask one of your aunts or uncles, *Can you see the spoon?* **[*Laughs*]** Well that's—you're asking, *Is it going to be good gumbo; is the gumbo going to be good today or not?* Well so that's the spoon test. If you can see the spoon, your gumbo is too thin.

00:49:52

But by cooking it for two hours I have a chance to get it to the right consistency I want before I ever add my meat. And then, like I told you in the beginning, my meat—I always use a hen because a hen and a chicken, number one, have two completely different flavors. A hen has a richer flavor than a chicken. And secondly, because you cook the gumbo so long, and then on top of that you can it for so long, you don't want a meat that's going to fall apart and break into pieces. And chicken falls

apart off—and shreds a lot easier than a hen does. So a hen holds together better, so a hen is better for the--for the gumbo, and—.

00:50:35

SR: I'll just say, what I liked about your gumbo was that it was clear that the hen meat had cooked for a long time, like it was very—

00:50:44

MH: Tender?

00:50:46

SR: —tender, but it—yeah, tender, but it also still was in pieces, like it wasn't all shreddy like if you had—

00:50:51

MH: It didn't break up.

00:50:52

SR: —if you had cooked just a regular chicken that long.

00:50:53

MH: Uh-hm, and see, some people are worried that if you can food on top of cooking it, that it may cause it to shred, but that's the beauty of canning. Canning does not change what you put in there. I tell people when I do workshops on canning figs, for example, be careful when you go pick your figs. If you pick figs that are still kind of greenish, processing them [under] pressure is not going to turn them ripe. You're just going to have a jar of figs that are still kind of greenish. It--canning does not change what you put in there.

00:51:26

SR: Right.

00:51:26

MH: So if you put in meat that is still in whole pieces and not shredded, it's going to come out whole pieces. But it will be a lot tenderer, and

you'll see that on the--on the smoked sausage can—after you can smoked sausage. Even the skin is a lot more tender than--than usual.

00:51:44

But yeah, I like to use hen for that reason, and I cook my bones. When you go to fancy restaurants and stuff, I guess for etiquette reasons they--they de-bone the chicken for you. But you know, when people come to my house to eat it's like, look: not only am I not going to take it off the bones for you but I'm not going to eat it--I'm not going to chew it for you either. **[*Laughs*]** If you can't—you can take your own chicken off the bone. **[*Laughs*]** But I like to keep the bone, not just out of laziness but because it really does serve a purpose. The bone is where you get a lot of the flavor from. You know when people buy chicken—I make my own chicken stock, for example, but even people who buy chicken broth in a can or chicken stock in a can, the misconception is that that's boiled from chicken. It's not; it's from the bones. The bone and the marrow—you crack the bones. That's one reason when I cut up my hen, even like the leg, I don't leave any piece whole. I'll take a big old mallet or hatchet and I'll chop the pieces, even the leg, like in half

because I want to crack and expose the inside of that bone, the marrow. That's where the flavor and a lot of the nutrition is.

00:52:50

So all of that coming--seeping into the juices while it's cooking, it adds a lot of flavor; most of your flavor comes from the bone rather than the meat. And you also get a--a darker color, too. If you notice, like when you're cooking jambalaya or making a gravy, if you use a center-cut pork chop and you use, let's say, a sirloin tip pork chop that has a bone in it, the grillades on the bottom, the sticky part where you make the gravy, it'll come out darker, browner-looking, from the piece with the bone in it, because the darkness a lot comes out—the marrow adds a lot to that.

00:53:20

Well so when I cook my chick--my hen, I cut every piece at least two or three times. I don't mind if people take two or three pieces, but what I'm saying is I'd rather you take two or three pieces that are cracked and enjoy the flavor than one whole piece—it's still in-tact—that hasn't had enough time to assimilate with the whole gumbo. So the

flavor gets out when I cook it with the bones. And I can it with the bones again because it just adds more flavor as it stays under pressure and it doesn't hurt anything to--to have the bones in there.

00:53:53

So I'll put all my hen in there—

00:53:55

SR: So you--you don't put the hen in until the roux has been cooking in the water for a couple hours?

00:53:59

MH: About two hours, that's right. I time it exactly, two hours, because the neat thing about it is, like I said, Cajun cooking is very simple. And you know back in the day, in the hard times when they were cooking like this and--and pits they dug in the ground, you know, and stones and stuff or whatever, that was the only thing you had to do all day. I can set that roux cooking, my gumbo, for two hours. I can go out here and wash clothes. I can go, you know, vacuum. I can do different housework, so it

just stays there and it cooks on its own for two hours. And then I put in the hen. A hen will cook an hour and a half to two hours by itself. So before you ever sit down and eat a bowl of gumbo, it's already cooked about five hours: two hours for the roux and then two hours for that hen. And I put in my andouille. Now see, when I first started when I was young and stuff and didn't--and when I didn't know any better, and number two, even if knew better I didn't have the money to buy fancy ingredients, I made gumbo without the andouille. But the truth is once I started cooking with andouille in my gumbo, I will never do without. You can't imagine the difference; the only difference between andouille and smoked sausage is how much seasoning you put in it. They're both pork meat; they're both smoked to preserve it. But it's the seasonings, the spices you put in each one that makes them taste different. And andouille is so packed with spices that by the time I put that in with my hen so it also cooks for two hours so all the spices disseminate into the gumbo so every bite has flavor even if you don't have—you know you have hen stock, you have andouille stock, you have smoked sausage stock. You have all those flavors mingling in there with the gumbo.

00:55:44

So I use a hen, andouille, and I'll either put smoked sausage or I'll put fresh sausage. I make my own fresh sausage, mostly just because I like to, but not every place--not every place sells fresh sausage, fresh pork sausage, so—. And I grew up eating it, but meat markets today, now you don't really have that many meat markets. You mostly have a meat section in the grocery store; it's not quite the same thing. So I really like pork sausage so I thought, *I'm going to have—if I want to eat it I have to make it*, so I make my own pork sausage.

00:56:16

But sometimes I'll use smoked sausage or sometimes I'll use [fresh] pork sausage depending on which one I have. So I put all those meats in there. The hen and the andouille cook for two hours and then I'll put the smoked sausage in, let's say about the last 30 minutes because it is already fully cooked. And here's the funny thing about smoked sausage: a lot of people tell you when you're cooking red beans, for example, *Don't put your smoked sausage in the red beans 'cause it makes it tougher as--as the skin gets tougher*, and it's true. It gets

tougher, so I put it in toward the end so that it doesn't get as tough but the flavor still gets in the gumbo.

00:56:47

The irony is after I cook it for 30 minutes so it doesn't get tough, then I put--cook it for another hour and a half in the pressure canner and it tenderizes it. **[*Laughs*]** See, the pressure-canning process tenderizes it, so in the end we have very resilient smoked sausage. It's--it's more pliable. So I always put in a green--green onions, and I usually put parsley. I didn't today because I forgot. But I usually put in green onions and parsley like the last 20 minutes. You turn your fire off because you don't want to cook it. And you just, you--you chop your green onions and your parsley and whatever and you just put it on top, close the lid, turn off the fire, and you just let it sit there for 20 minutes—just kind of steeps, you know like a teabag does. It just steeps and the juices and the flavors get into the gumbo, but they still keep their integrity. You don't--you don't see these shriveled up green specks floating around. It still looks like a piece of green onion or like a piece of parsley. So that's my big secret. **[*Laughs*]**

00:57:48

SR: What about, do you start with any seasoning vegetables—onion or celery?

00:57:52

MH: Oh--oh yeah, I forgot, yeah right. After the--after the hens have been cooking about an hour—because you see the longer you cook onions, bell peppers, celery, they disintegrate, you know. As you cook onions, you know when you start to sauté them they start to turn translucent and then they get clear and then they just kind of like—they disappear. Well I don't like to cook mine to the point where you--you can't see them anymore, so I'll let the hen cook about like an hour and then I'll throw in my onions, celery. Today I didn't put bell peppers. I just put onions and celery today, but I put a lot of onions. Because, number one, even people who say, *Oh I don't like onions*—you know how kids—*I'm not eating onions.* Trust me, if there wasn't onions in here you really would not eat it because onions add a whole lot of flavor.

But because they do tend to disintegrate, I want to make sure that I have enough that even though some disintegrate you still see some. So I'll usually put like, say, two large onions in a pot of gumbo. And that way I--I still am able to see something, but they do clear and as they get clear, you know, that's their juice getting out into the--into the thing. So onions and celery I put in; every now and then I'll put in a little bit of bell pepper, and not too much because bell pepper has a strong flavor, you know by itself. That's why a lot of people don't like, they stay stuffed peppers, because it has--it's a strong vegetable, and if you have a sensitive stomach or if you don't like the taste, it is kind of strong. I like it but not everybody does. My roommate doesn't, so I don't put it—I don't put them in there very often, but—.

00:59:22

I don't put garlic in mine because I don't want my gumbo to taste like a stew. If you put the exact same seasonings in every single dish, well they're all going to taste the same, so I do leave—I do add some things to the stew that I wouldn't add to a gumbo and vice-versa, so they add a little different flavor, you know.

00:59:41

SR: Oh that's interesting. **[*Laughs*]**

00:59:45

MH: You want some more coffee?

00:59:46

SR: Sure, I'll have a little more. This banana bread is delicious.

00:59:49

MH: Thank you.

00:59:52

SR: It kind of tastes like my mom's actually.

00:59:52

MH: My hurricane bread.

00:59:53

SR: Your hurricane bread. Thank you. What was I going to ask? So is this your standard gumbo, or do you ever make, like, an okra gumbo or anything like that?

01:00:07

MH: Well on the years that I grow okra I make a shrimp and okra gumbo sometimes, which I really like. But my standard gumbo is this, is the hen, because, again, back to the basics. Why--why do people—I mean we love the taste of it, of course, but let's be honest: people make dishes like gumbo and soup or whatever to stretch. So chicken and hen is cheap, so that--that is my standard one, and I live close—like I said, very close to a sausage factory, so I'm able to get bulk--bulk sausage at a discount. So for me, this is the cheapest. I could feed an army. I could feed several families, you know, just for a couple of dollars. So this is my standard one because it is cheaper to make and I like it.

01:00:54

SR: Have you tried to can any kind of seafood?

01:00:59

MH: No, I've never canned seafood yet. And it's not that I'm scared of it; it's not that I don't think I could. Seafood is my number one favorite food and I never have any left over to can. **[*Laughs*]** That's the problem there, so the truth is, you know, if I know for example, *Oh Friday we're having boiled crabs*, starting by Tuesday I can hardly sleep at night. You know I can hardly wait for Friday to get here, so there is never any extra to--to can of seafood—not around here. **[*Laughs*]**

01:01:27

SR: That's a good reason. I buy it. What about filé; do you ever use filé in your gumbo?

01:01:33

MH: I don't. I keep it on hand because some people like to add it to their gumbo, but I don't use it because, see, the whole purpose to filé is to thicken the gumbo. But again, if you do my spoon test you don't have to thicken the gumbo. And one thing that I--I am leery about with filé is, if you just put this much too much, then your gumbo becomes slimy. So I like it just clean and smooth, and if you use my spoon test you won't have to thicken it. So I don't use filé in mine but I do keep it on hand because I know some people, you know some people do like it, but not here.

01:02:18

SR: Can you tell me where you grew up?

01:02:24

MH: Yes, I grew up here in South Louisiana, down by Lafayette. And you know, when I was growing up I could hardly wait to get out of here. I wanted to go see the world. I wanted to live in the big city. You know I had all these fantasies of what I wanted, and so when I turned 17 I left. I

went and lived in Houston. I didn't have any relatives there. I didn't know anybody there. I just took off on my own because I wanted to live in the big city. From there I would move to Atlanta. I lived in New Orleans. I lived in large cities. But you know, as they say, everything comes around full circle. So here I am. I'm not back where--in my--where I grew up, but I did end up coming back to my rural roots, and on purpose. I wanted to find a place that was back in the country, in the rural countryside where you could just—there's more freedom here than in a big city. And you know now that I've mellowed out some I'm very content to stay here and--and watch the hummingbirds in the morning and drink my coffee and eat my gumbo. To me that's a good life.

[*Laughs*]

01:03:32

SR: That is—it does seem like a good life out here. So just tell me a little bit about your--your family. You were saying that there were five siblings, and who in--who inspired you with cooking in your household,

or even outside your household? Was there—is there somebody you think about when you cook?

01:03:53

MH: Well my mother was a very, very good cook. And she could--she could cook. I--I never have—to this day I cannot hold a candle to my mother's cooking. She makes her own bread. She can make her mayonnaise. She can make butter. And she—like I said, every day, three meals a day, she laid out a spread for seven people, even when we were teenagers. You know a teenager doesn't eat like a human being. They eat like three people plus a horse, you know **[*Laughs*]** apiece. So, but she could lay out a spread and I honestly can't think of anything she has ever fixed that I did not like. And all of her cooking was from scratch, so when I was young and I had these illusions of grandeur that I wanted to live in a big city—you know you--you always think the grass is greener on the other side, so I went to live in a big city all right. But after a while I started missing some of Mama's home cooking, because you know a hamburger, you can only eat so many before it just—*This isn't right.*

Transcript provided by:
Shelley M. Chance t/a Pro.Docs
www.prodocservices.com

You're hungry for home-cooking. So living alone, being in a strange place, a big city where I didn't know anybody, I had to learn how to do it. If I wanted to eat it I was going to have to learn how to cook it. Mama wasn't there for me to go raid the refrigerator anymore, you know, so--so I got recipes from my old aunts, and you know I got my mother to write down some and—.

01:05:28

When I was first learning how to cook I--I really did some horrible things in the name of food. **[*Laughs*]** I mean, you know some of the stuff I did to food was a crime, but so a lot of it I had to learn by trial and error. And like I said, as I've gotten older and learned more about spices and developed my own tastes, I've tweaked recipes and I've invented new recipes, and so I've kind of come into my own. But I think one thing that inspired me to cook that I think it such a tragedy today is I grew up knowing the difference between a home-cooked Sunday meal and something that you picked up in--in a paper bag out of a drive-thru window, you know. And kids nowadays, through no fault of their own because times have changed—I know--I know two parents have to work

nowadays to make ends to meet. I'm not oblivious to--to the challenges that are out there in raising a family, but I'm just saying I had an advantage because I grew up in a home where we ate as a family, for example.

01:06:27

You--we--I don't care if you were starving; we always said we were starving—you know the drama and everything. We always were starving and, *We're going to die if we don't eat* and all this, but my mother **[*Laughs*]** —we had to wait 'til my daddy came home and we would sit down at the table as a family. And to this day, even though there's just two of us here in the house, now that's still an important thing for me: that we sit down and eat together, because, as I told you earlier, I think of canning as an art form; cooking is an expression of--of femininity. It is a way that we nurture the world. We--we provide for people; we give to people. It's a giving of ourselves, and anyone who is truly someone I take in as a friend, I sit down and share a meal with. It's part of the way I say, *Not only do I welcome you in my structural home, but I'm opening my heart*. *I'm giving some of myself to you*. So there's a

lot of psychological and spiritual—we pray before meals here. You know, we--we do that. So there's a lot of bonding that goes on around a table, and I was very fortunate to grow up in an era where my mother was able to stay home. Now, we were not rich. You hear that all the time: everybody says, *Oh now we were not rich growing up, but we survived* or whatever. People downplay that; it's true. We were not rich and, yes, we did survive. But I'm not sure that people today could live like I grew up without whining and complaining because we've just gotten so accustomed and we have this—kids nowadays have this sense of entitlement that somehow they're going to report you to--to Child [Protective] Services if they don't have their own iPod or their own computer in their room or whatever. You know we didn't have any of that.

01:08:18

If you wanted entertainment then you come sit at the table and you know we'll play a board game or we'll talk or whatever. So I was very fortunate in the food area to grow up with a mother that knew how to cook, because you see her father left when they were quite young. So my

mother, being the oldest, cooked for nine children **[*Emphasis Added*]** and then her mother. Every day her mother, my grandmother, would sit—she was a seamstress and she would mend people's clothes and sew for $1.25. She—or 50-cents or whatever. She sewed from morning literally 'til night when she could not see anymore. So my mother had to do all the cooking for nine children.

01:08:58

So that's how she learned to make bread and make everything else. Well so I was very fortunate that when I grew up she had those cooking skills and I--I got to appreciate what true home cooking tasted like, and so I think that's one reason why I took an interest in cooking, was because I missed that. You know as bad as—when I was young, as bad as I wanted to get away and try living a different way or living different places and seeing the world and all that, the truth is the best part of life was back at home where—and so I've just come back to my roots now, and so now I cook and I share meals with people, you know as part of a bonding experience.

01:09:40

SR: Well that was very—that was really a great way to articulate what food can mean, I think. So I know that you know—I met you through a mutual friend, who took a workshop with you about canning. Have you done that for more people; have you passed--have you been passing on this art form?

01:10:04

MH: That workshop I did, the Master Gardeners, the Lafayette Master Gardeners, that was the first time I had ever done a workshop in my life. And I was almost as nervous with that as I was for you coming over today. **[*Laughs*]**

01:10:16

SR: I can't tell you were nervous. You're so good. You're a natural.

01:10:19

MH: Well I've been drinking a lot of decaf **[*Laughs*]**. No seriously, I think I'm able to be comfortable because this is something that I know. You know when you're sharing yourself and not having to make up stuff, it's easier to be comfortable. But what I've noticed is, of course I've had other people ask me to do a workshop or, like you, interview me; anyone who is interested in learning, I'd be happy to--to share with them. **[*Beeps*]**

01:10:50

SR: Is it done? Is it an hour and a half already?

01:10:52

MH: Yes, it's an hour and a half. So here's what I'm going to do. Now that it's finished I'm going to go ahead and turn it off. Now the pressure that is in the canner is—obviously it has nowhere to go, remember 'cause the lid is on there.

01:11:06

SR: Right.

01:11:06

MH: If you take that cap off now—

01:11:10

SR: Don't do it. **[*Laughs*]**

01:11:12

MH: —it will explode.

01:11:12

SR: Don't do it.

01:11:13

MH: I'm not--I'm not going to demonstrate it, okay, for your article, but it's just going to happen. When it cools down enough the pressure will drop and the same little tab that popped up when the pressure rose

to a certain level, when the pressure drops it will drop. That's how you're going to know when it's safe. When this little button drops flat and you'll hear—you can hear it in the other room; it will make like a little clanking sound. When the--when the button drops, that means the pressure in here has dropped enough that it's safe for you to open the lid, okay, and then from there I'll show you how we take the jars out and we complete the--a canning process.

01:11:55

SR: Okay. **[*Banging*]** I don't know what that was.

01:11:54

MH: A ghost.

01:11:56

SR: How long does that take about?

01:11:57

MH: It's going to take about 20 minutes.

01:11:59

SR: Oh okay.

01:12:00

MH: Because we were at 10-pounds of pressure. But the truth is, whether it's 10-pounds of pressure or 11-pounds of pressure, one pound isn't going to make that big of difference, so it's going to take about 20 minutes for the canner to cool down enough to open the lid. Don't ever think that it's going to cool down enough for you to touch it because you know you could—if your skin melts on the pot, you won't be able to pull your finger off or whatever, so you really don't want to—you don't want to push it. You want to be safe in the canning process. You want to do it right the first time, so that you'll have, you know, food for whenever you need it. But you--you do need to be safe through the thing.

01:12:36

Once the--the button drops and I know it's safe to open the canner, you do everything in reverse. Remember the last thing we did was put on the cap, so the first thing I'm going to do is take off the cap. Then you unscrew the lid and remove it, and of course you stand back because the steam will come shooting out of the—'cause it's hot in there, and you'll see. When I use the tongs and I remove a jar, even though there's no fire on the stove, the pressure has dropped; when I pull one of those jars out of there it will still be bubbling.

01:13:09

SR: Inside?

01:13:09

MH: It's going to be boiling inside the jar. You'll be able to see that and maybe take a picture of it. That's how hot it got in that canner, so that's how you know that all those—the various organisms or whatever--bacteria that break down meat—that's how you know they're dead. You've killed the pressure. The pressure in there got so hot, and it got so

hot that it killed all those organisms that would cause your meat to spoil. That's how I can--can spaghetti or chili dogs or gumbo and just leave it there on the shelf. The meat will not go bad, because there's nothing left in the meat for it—to deteriorate it. So you'll see that when—in a minute. Like it'll take about 20 minutes, and when we open the lid you'll see the jars. They'll still be boiling. They could boil there on the counter; in fact I'll go ahead and set up a place here and you'll see. You'll have seven jars boiling there without any fire on them. That's how hot it got inside that pressure canner.

01:13:56

SR: I wonder what the actual temperature is. Do you have any idea?

01:14:02

MH: Hmm, well not right off the top of my head. In the manual that comes with the--with the pressure canner they may say, but that's just way over my level of expertise.

01:14:15

SR: Right.

01:14:16

MH: I just--I just guess.

01:14:16

SR: Just wondering, you know.

01:14:17

MH: **[*Laughs*]**

01:14:18

SR: Well I wanted to ask you earlier, do you have a favorite old cookbook that has canning recipes in it?

01:14:26

MH: No. The majority of the recipes I use I made up because you can get a lot of cookbooks; all cookbooks have a section on how to make jams and jellies and pickles or whatever, you know. But they don't all tell you how to can them. So a lot of my recipes I've learned from experience. For example, if I find a recipe somewhere that tells you how, what pressure and how long, what--how to can, let's say okra, then you can just about figure, *Well if I can okra that way I probably can green beans the same way.* You know that's how I come up with a lot of it. But a lot of my information, I'm going to give credit to the source and that is the LSU Cooperative Extension Agency. Every parish in Louisiana has a Cooperative Extension office, and you see, in the old days, LSU was formed--created to teach farmers. So that's why LSU to this day is still real big in agriculture. So what they did was, in all 64 parishes they would set up an office somewhere—more like a closet, but a little office somewhere—and they had an Extension agent, an agent from LSU that extended the--the School of LSU—see, they extended out into the community. So the Extension agent in every parish is the one, he can answer your question: *Oh, my cow is sick*, or *My fig tree looks like it's*

dying, or whatever. You could call the Extension agent and get questions about horticulture and all that. That's what the Lafayette Master Gardeners was formed to do. We help now the Extension agent answer some of those questions for people in the community.

01:16:17

Well, over time the Extension agency's office expanded to include a home economist. You could call someone to ask them questions about, *My green beans look like they have some kind of disease* or whatever. All right, well then it got to the point where you could call up the Extension agent and say, *Okay, I've grown all these green beans. What do I do with them?* And so the home economist in the Extension Agency office that is in every parish has recipes on jams, free recipes on jams, jellies, canning, preserves—anything you want. You can get on the phone and call them and I've done it a million times when I first started off, before I started working and assisting the office. I used to call there all the time. *I'm looking for a recipe for blackberry--elderberry wine*, for example.

01:17:16

SR: Have you made that?

01:17:16

MH: No, but you can. You think of something you'd like to cook, or, *My grandmother used to have a recipe. She used to make it, but I don't--you can't find it anymore.* You call; it's amazing what those people can do. And they will send you the literature for free. **[*Emphasis Added*]** I have some photos—some--some pamphlets—I can show you here. If you say—you can call up there: *I have a fig tree. What do I do? Can you give me some ideas of what to do with the figs?* They will send you brochures and brochures with how to make fig preserves, how to make fig jam, how to make fig cake, how to make fig-whatever. The Extension Agent's office has become a valuable resource. They are loaded with information. That office now also is the base for the 4-H Program, see because 4-H has to do with agrarian living, LSU. They also have a--a department now that deals with Family Services, not like child protection but I'm saying like teaching you about the food pyramid.

They have classes on how to balance--serve balanced meals and feed your family and whatever. And all of this is free, funded by the State of Louisiana, and you can get a wealth of information from—and, like I said, for free. So I got a lot of my recipes—for example, growing up I didn't like pickles. Okay, now I do but growing up I didn't, so when I decided I wanted to make some pickles—because everybody--every cookbook has a recipe for pickles. And as you look through some of those, like I said again, look at the ingredients, some of that stuff—I ain't eating that. It didn't look good to me, so I said, *I'm going to call the Extension Agency.* So she sent me Xeroxed--a stack of Xeroxed papers this thick **[*Gestures*]** on—about a quarter of an inch thick—on how to make pickles, how to can pickles, the theory--the theory behind canning pickles, and recipes—more recipes than I will ever use in my entire life.

01:19:15

So you can get a lot of recipes, not just on canning but just how to cook food, how to--how to dry--how to dry food, dehydrate food, anything that has to do with food, agriculture, growing fruit trees, raising strawberries, pruning an elm tree. You can get all that information for

free and it's in every parish in Louisiana that they have one of those. So a lot of my recipes that I started off [with] came from that free service there that--that the State provides in the Extension county office.

01:19:51

And then let's say they had a--a recipe—I know for a fact she gave me a recipe on how to cook and can chili. So I started thinking about it: well you know spaghetti is kind of like chili. It's tomato sauce; it's ground meat. Same thing. So from there I was able to deduce, well, if I can chili this way, then I can can spaghetti the same way. And so that's how—see I never--I never had a recipe on how to can gumbo, but she did give me a recipe on how to can chicken stock. So I said, *Well that's nothing but chicken stock and a roux*, so I was able to deduce from those--from those free pamphlets how to can some of the stuff I do now.

01:20:29

SR: That's an amazing resource. So you said that—

01:20:32

MH: And free, and there's a Web site, too. If I'm not mistaken it's www.lsu.agcenter or www.lsuagcenter.org or something like that [it's www.lsuagcenter.com]. I'm not sure what it is, but I know it's--I know it's lsuagcenter--a-g-center, altogether one word, and you--from the menu there you can decide, *Well do I want to talk to the home economist,* or *do I want to talk to someone about how do I immunize my cattle,* or *do I want to talk*—you know, whatever your question might be. And every parish now has a program because you can imagine once this free service catches on the public really utilizes it. Not only that, but every now and then throughout the year, we invite people downtown into the office and we have free talks. We have experts come in to talk about how to grow citrus trees, and the public—it's all free. The public comes and they sit and they listen to all this information and they get the brochures or whatever, and all of this is a free extension of what the Ag Center is here serving the--the people of Louisiana.

01:21:33

SR: Wow.

01:21:34

MH: So—

01:21:37

SR: Well, and now you—you said that you assist them. Is that because you've been through the Master Gardeners program?

01:21:44

MH: Oh yeah, that's what I was saying. See, as time has gone on there's been more and more demand for some of these services. Well one agent sitting in his office cannot handle all the phone calls that come in, all the whatever, because a lot of their jobs is, *I need to see your oak tree before I can tell you what's wrong with it, because*—you know. So they spend a lot of time on the road and they drive--they drive all over to look at people's weed problems or bug problems or disease problems or what have you. So they--they needed someone back at the office to be

able to answer the question when somebody calls in about their roses or what have you.

01:22:31

So they developed this program called the Louisiana Master Gardeners, and I don't know that I would so much say we're masters at it, but we--we are—let's say we know a little bit more about gardening and horticulture maybe than the average person might because we have this training. So LSU trains us in an intensive program basically for free. We--the fee you pay pays for your materials and supplies, but they have their person who does pesticides come and talk to us. They have the LSU person who does orange trees come and talk to us. The rose expert comes to talk to us. The termite specialist comes. They have all these people who come and tell us all they know in an intensive program. It's a test at the end and all this kind of stuff, and then in exchange what we do is we commit to serving the public. Our first year, you commit to 40 hours of community service time, which is not like a chain gang, you know. Like it's not the same community service that the people in orange do. We agree like to answer the phone in the office and to help

people. Let's say if one of my neighbors—*I don't know what's wrong with my tomatoes this year*. *They're just not growing as well*. See, I help them out, by spreading the knowledge and helping people, educating people. That's what the Louisiana Master Gardeners Program is about: educating the public for free just to help them out.

01:24:00

And so our first year we give 40 hours of our time commitment; we end up giving more than that because it's really fun. Once--once you get into the program and you meet people who have a similar interest, who have been through the same program, who have—they're like you, you relate to them; it's--it's more like a family. I know here in the—each parish has its own program, so—well I say most parishes do. Opelousas and Saint Landry Parish does not have a Master Gardener Program, for whatever reason, so I had to go to Lafayette. So I'm in the Lafayette Chapter of the Louisiana Master Gardener Program.

01:24:36

SR: Oh okay.

01:24:36

MH: And so each year we put our applications in the newspapers and they're on TV. A new class just started in this September, the beginning of this month, and we train—each year we train 25 to 35 more people who go out into the community and help people, and in return for the training they do the volunteer hours that--that I'm talking about.

01:25:01

SR: That's so great because it--it just helps preserve the agrarian traditions of this area.

01:25:06

MH: Yes, that's right. And the truth is maybe not everybody is interested in—literally they have information on how to skin a pig, and you know I was reading one article on how to make pickled pork. I love pickled pork. Well they literally say, after you skin your pig and everything you stuff him in this wooden barrel and you cover it with

salt. And I'm thinking, *No, no* **[*Laughs*]**; *no even--that's a little bit too rustic for me*. So not everybody wants to--to do that, and not everybody wants to go to the extreme of canning or whatever. But you know what? Everybody does have at least one plant, a living plant somewhere. Everyone—whether you want to take it on as a responsibility or not—everyone has a connection with nature and we all want to be part of something living and giving. And so whether your interest is in canning or skinning your own pig, or whether you just want to grow a rosebush or you like hummingbirds. What--what kinds of plants can I plant at my window that will attract hummingbirds? Everybody has a—from one degree to another—an interest in--in nature. And so we're here--we are--the organization was formed to help people wherever you are. Whatever your interest happens to be, we have someone who is an expert on everything. We can get an answer for you even if we don't know it.

01:26:30

SR: That's great. So are you going to try canning pickled pork?

01:26:35

MH: No. **[*Laughs*]** Well you see pickled pork, which this is an interesting—I'm glad you brought that up. Pickled pork is already preserved. It's preserved pork, which don't think for one minute that means because it's preserved you can leave it out. There's a difference between preserving something and canning something. Preserve means that it will hold onto its integrity longer than--than usual. You know pickled pork will last longer in your refrigerator than just a raw piece of pork. But canning means you can—you don't have to keep it in the refrigerator or freezer. It will stay uncontaminated and preserved for a longer period of time under a different environment. So pickled pork makes me think of that. No, I wouldn't do all that. But I could can--cook with pickled pork—red beans or something like that with pickled pork, and I could can that. I've done that before.

01:27:38

Make my own—. You know my friend, she loves bean and bacon soup. Well by accident I figured out one time, I fell—and it was totally

by accident—I figured out how to make it. So now I stop buying it and I just make my own. **[*Laughs*]**

01:27:52

SR: What do you mean *by accident*? What happened?

01:27:55

MH: Well I got a smoker for Christmas one year and I always wanted to learn how to smoke. So I took a turkey and I split it in half. I call it spread-eagle. So I--I spread the carcass out like this so he's laying flat **[*Gestures*]** because they cook faster, you know, if they're spread out rather than if they're left whole.

01:28:17

So we—it came out delicious and we were eating the meat, eating the meat, and just picking on it, picking on it. But when you smoke it, you know the skin got tough. But the thing about the smoking is all the flavor got in the skin. So I really do not waste anything. **[*Laughs*]** People--people make fun of us, but you know what? I haven't met a

person yet that didn't laugh at me in the beginning and then by the time it was over go home and try it themselves. So don't knock it before you try it. I said, *There's got to be something I can do with that skin*. So you know we haven't eaten on it or anything.

01:28:52

So what I did was, when I got a bag of dried beans, dried white beans and while they were boiling on the stove, I put that smoked skin in there. And the smoke flavor, you see—but it was natural smoked flavor because when I smoke, I do not use chemicals. That stuff they call Liquid Smoke? I don't use that; that's nothing but chemicals. When I smoke a turkey I use apple juice. I go break an orange off my tree. I--I break a couple of kumquats. I use onions. I use fruits and vegetables and apple juice and I smoke my turkey that way. It's only natural stuff on it.

01:29:31

So that skin—

01:29:31

SR: Excuse me: Where do you put the fruit and vegetables?

01:29:35

MH: Well in a smoker—

01:29:36

SR: Inside or—?

01:29:38

MH: I have a charcoal smoker. And you put your—you have a bowl in the bottom that you fill with hot charcoal. On top of that you have another bowl that you set—they say water. But I know I can improve on water. I put apple juice in mine.

01:29:52

SR: Oh I see.

01:29:52

MH: And I slice an orange. I break some celery. I put some onions in there and I let that float in the apple juice. So while the charcoal, the way it heats up the--the juice, it's the steam from the fruits that--that actually smoke my turkey. So I--I peel off that skin 'cause it's too tough to eat anyway, and I throw it there in my dried beans, and I'm telling you even though the skin came off a turkey it tastes—the--the gravy, the beans taste like they're saturated with bacon. That's what they taste like. So at the last minute I just pull the skin out so no one sees it; everybody thinks I went out and bought bean and bacon soup from the deli. **[*Laughs*]** But so not—and then the--the bones, if you look in my refrigerator, my freezer, right now I have two turkey carcasses in there. I saved that carcass because there's always some meat left on it, and I save my skin like--like it's gold. I treasure it. And so when I make dried beans I usually make, like I said, two pounds at a time, because if I'm going to can I make enough to make it worth my while, because you see it takes a long time or whatever.

01:30:53

SR: Yeah.

01:30:54

MH: So a two-pound bag will make enough to fill that large Magnalite roaster that takes up to two burners. So I pour my dried beans in there and fill it with filtered water and then I throw my turkey carcass and my skin in there, and it boils for an hour. When the beans are done they come out creamy, soupy, and it's--it tastes like you--it tastes like bacon. Yeah, so I found something to do, so I don't need the pickled pork anymore. I can just--I can smoke myself a turkey and use the skin.

[*Laughs*]

01:31:23

SR: That makes me think of something else we talked about. I'm not going to keep you much longer, but one thing I wrote down is that you said you canned bones for the dog. Tell me about that.

01:31:34

MH: Well that's certainly a conversation starter. I didn't want anybody to think that I actually have jars of bones in my house, and this is not like a laboratory or anything, **[*Laughs*]** but what I was saying was in working with the pressure canner I found out that I could make my own bonemeal, because you see I do make my own chicken salad. When chicken comes on sale I'll go get a big bag of chicken, cut it up in pieces. I put it in the pressure cooker. There's a difference between a pressure cooker and a canner, so watch which one you get. You get a pressure cooker, I put all the chicken in there raw, turn it up just like we did today and let the pressure build up, you know, and cook it for so many minutes. When you turn it off the chicken just falls off the bone and the bones are so brittle you can just with two fingers, you can snap a leg bone or whatever. They're just—even though they're in-tact they're very brittle.

01:32:33

So chicken bones, which normally you do not give your dog because they'll choke on them, if they come out of the pressure canner, when they cool off you can give them because when you--when you

squeeze them in your hand they just pulverize into powder. There you go: bonemeal. So every now and then I'll go to the butcher shop and he may have like—if they're carving that day he may have, you know, bones, leg bones or whatever, leftover and so I'll bring some home and I'll put them in the pressure canner and give them to my dog. And he'll just sit there and—you know like the consistency of a Hershey bar. You know how it holds solid but if you put your teeth on it, it kind of--just kind of snaps and breaks?

01:33:10

SR: Uh-hm.

01:33:10

MH: That's how the bones come out; that's how--that's how brittle they come out, so—.

01:33:15

SR: So you literally don't have to waste anything?

01:33:18

MH: No. **[*Laughs*]** People laugh at me but I'm telling you, you know we're in a lot of the mess we're in now because people waste so much. Now I mean I don't get grotesque about it, and it's not like I--I have a back room full of bones waiting for projects to do with them or anything, but I'm saying, as I accidentally come upon things I can use stuff for, use every bit—. For example, people laugh at me when I make fried chicken.

01:33:45

When we fry chicken we'll eat fried chicken, fried chicken, until we're tired of it. Okay, fine. When we get tired of eating the fried chicken, trust me, in my house you just as soon eat it when I put it on the table 'cause one way or another it's going--you're going to--it's going to come back to you. So **[*Laughs*]** don't think you're going to get away from it by just not eating it.

01:34:04

When we get tired of eating fried chicken, like fried chicken, I take whatever is left. I take it off the bones, even the crust, and I put it there in the food processor with some celery and I zip, zip, zip—pulverize it, add mayonnaise, and then I have chicken salad spread.

01:34:22

SR: Yum.

01:34:23

MH: So and see, because all the seasonings are in that coating, whatever you coating happens to be, so it's--it's a very flavorful thing. So I don't--I don't waste a lot. I try not to waste anything because I believe every—I do believe that God has blessed us with--with a lot here. And it's not that I think, Oh you'll be punished if you throw away a chicken wing or—. I'm not a fanatic about it, but I do believe if you have a mentality that says, *I don't care; I'll just get some more later*—okay, that I believe we'll be accountable for. And every day when I turn on the TV, and I see people in other parts of the world, sometimes in

other parts of my own state, that have just lost their homes that have nothing that line up for three hours because all they want is some--some water to drink, every day it reminds me of just how blessed I am. And I have a responsibility to be a good steward. And I take that seriously.

01:35:24

SR: I appreciate that. Well I think that's a great place to wrap this up.

01:35:31

MH: Okay, great. I enjoyed your questions.

01:35:33

SR: Yeah, you answered way more than I had written—better. You gave better answers than the questions I wrote down.

01:35:39

MH: [*Laughs*] Well great.

01:35:40

SR: Thank you so much. We'll wait for that thing to drop.

01:35:41

MH: Okay, you're very welcome, Miss Sara. Great.

01:35:45

[End Marie Hebert Interview]