

SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE

Center for the Study of Southern Culture Barnard Observatory University, MS 38677

Coordinates with ACCESSION #: _____

Interview Transcription:

SUBJECT: Martin Sawyer, bartender
The Rib Room
Omni Royal Orleans
621 St. Louis Street
New Orleans, LA 70140

DATE: March 31, 2005 @ 10:00 a.m.

LOCATION: Saturn Bar

INTERVIEWER: Amy Evans

LENGTH: Approx. 80 minutes

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Amy Evans: This is Thursday March thirty-first, two thousand and five. This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance in New Orleans at the Royal Orleans Hotel—the Rib Room—in the Roundtable dining room adjacent to the Rib Room, with Mister Martin Sawyer, a bartender here. And Mister Sawyer, would you state your whole name and also your birthday, please sir?

Martin Sawyer: Um, my whole name is, uh, Martin Sawyer. My birthday is May the fourth, nineteen twenty-one.

AE: And you've been here at the Rib Room for thirty-four years?

MS: Thirty-four years this, uh, March the, uh, twenty-fifth.

AE: My goodness! Now, where you born in New Orleans.

MS: Yes, born in New Orleans.

AE: And your parents, are they originally from New Orleans?

MS: Well, my grandmother came from the Atchafalaya River. That's up—up in Louisiana, like going north in Louisiana. And, um, I think my father, from what I could understand, he came from over on the other side of the lake [Pontchartrain]. Which I think he was mixed with Indian you know.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: My mother was born here in New Orleans and so was I. So I've been in New Orleans, you know, all my life.

AE: What did your parents do for a living?

MS: Huh?

AE: What did your parents do for work?

MS: Well it's been so many years ago, [you] figure me eighty-four, so they didn't have nothing to do. Like my grandmother, she took in washing and, you know, did things like that. Other than that there wasn't no jobs available, you know, of any construction. My father he worked on the WPA [Works Progress Administration], when that was out many years ago. If you remember reading about—

AE: Uh-huh—

MS: —about the—

AE: —sure.

MS: His name was Dennis Sawyer.

AE: Okay, and your mother's name?

MS: Laura Sawyer.

AE: All right. So how'd you all get by as a family?

MS: Well, I was so small I couldn't remember how we got by but, uh, me myself, I start—when I got up to the age early—early, you know, ol—o—old enough I started working at grocery stores delivering groceries.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: That was a job that paid one dollar a day for eight hours, so that wasn't nothing much.

AE: Do you remember how old you were when you started doing that?

MS: Oh, I would say I was about fifteen, sixteen years old.

AE: Okay. And you went to school too or—?

MS: Hmm?

AE: Did you go to school also?

MS: Yeah, I went to school, but I got out early because, you see, years ago they didn't have like age starts and different things as far as schools concerned. And some of the parents didn't send their kids to school until they got around to it or a certain age. So sometimes when you went to school and—and—and you went like that say primer, head-start like that, could be eight or nine years old you know—

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: —so that was one of the fault that I didn't like so well because when I started to school, in my age they were kids much younger than me when they sent me to school. And it sort of made you feel a little embarrassed, you know, you the oldest one and, you know, and things like that.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: So I didn't like that too well. So I was glad when I was able to leave out of the school. It wasn't where they forced me to stay in school. Because the little money that I would make I would help them out to because things were real cheap at that time—very cheap. Some things you got two for a nickel, like two loaves of bread for a nickel and stuff like that. And they had, uh, what that call—what we call now lagniappe [and extra or unexpected gift], you know, this type of thing. And, uh, when you went to a grocery store—say, for instance, you wanted some beans and rice. You could get both of them for a nickel, you know, raw beans and raw rice for a nickel. Any, uh, if that's all you parents had, they uh, the kids would still ask the—the grocery man for a lagniappe, that was something extra for shopping from—by him, you know, that's the way that went. That's the where the lagniappe came in. So for a quarter you could buy a whole lot of stuff. You know, you could get beans, rice; you'd get your piece—your nickel piece of salt-meat, you know, so to put in your beans. You know, just things like that. And you can still ask the guy for a lagniappe, and your mother might have told you to say, "Tell him to give you an onion," see, you'd have that to go into your beans, you know. They didn't do all that like they do now-a-days when they cook, uh, red beans and rice you know. Uh, then they used to but onion in it, most of them did. Now, you know, they put parsley, celery, bring it up to get a little bit more of a flavor [tapping his feet].

AE: What else do you remember about New Orleans and those days growing up?

[COUNTER: 04:55]

MS: Oh, about New Orleans in those days? Well, there's so many things that, uh, I remember 'cause you see I'm going way, way back, you know, when you talk about New Orleans. Um, I used to, um, there was a dump

where they, um, got a school built there now—Booker T. Washington—and the city used to take all the trash and things after it was burnt and put it on this thing, like a big recycling—well, it wasn't a recycling, it was where they would put all the burnt cans and all that stuff. Well, when we was kids we used to go up there, reach in there and look for diamond rings, pieces of brass 'cause there was places that bought all that stuff. And we did that to go to the show, you know, went and sold it to the—what they called the "junk baron," you know. He bought rags and certain bottles and, uh, every now and then the gold man would come round asking you, "Do you have any gold to sell?" You know, like that.

AE: Y'all found some good stuff in there?

MS: Yeah, sometimes you'd be able—but it was burnt, and we didn't know the value of it, you know like that. And, uh, that—that's part of our hustling, you know. And we would, uh, we called it hustling, you know, trying to get along, you know. We would take that and, uh, over there where the, uh, Super Dome is now, a little distance before you get to the Super Dome when you come in there from the lake part of the city. Uh, they had the banana—used to come in [railroad] car boxes at that time, and, uh, and we would be there with our baskets, waiting for he bananas to fall off, and when they would fall to the ground, we would put them in our baskets, and then we would go to the neighborhood and sell the bananas, you know. And that was money for us. And we would go to Canal Street with McCardell's and Woolworth's and Grant's all them stores. And uh, they had what you call um cakes that they sell—cookies. And we would go in there and ask for a nickel bag of "brokers." That was the broke-up cakes—the brokers. And they'd give a bag that was about this big [using hands to illustrate a bag about the size of a book], and then we'd take the bananas that we had and eat the bananas with the cookies and then go to the train station and drink some water. We were straight for the day, you know what I'm saying [chuckles a little bit]. So, and then what we had left we would go to the [picture] show or something like that. Show was like fifteen cents, twenty cents, you know, right then.

AE: Did it—did you grow up with any brothers and sisters?

MS: Hmm?

AE: Did you grow up with any brothers and sisters?

MS: Do I have any brothers and sisters?

AE: Yes, sir.

MS: No, my brothers and sister, they done—they done past away over the years.

AE: How many did you have?

MS: Well, I had a—a older brother, which I never did see him. He had passed away before, you know, I could even recognize him. And then I had a younger brother named Victor and a sister named Catherine. Those were the onliest ones, you know, that I can recall in the family.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: But they all done passed away: grandmother, mother, father. So on the Sawyer side, my brother he had—my brother's son had some kids, so the Sawyer family is still big, you know. It's a big, big family.

AE: Well how did you get into the bartending business?

[Faint ring of Rib Room phone in background]

MS: Well, first I was working in a shipyard, you know. Working at the Delta shipyard where they was making Liberty ships. And I was working with steel guys, you know, the guys doing the welding and whatnot. And I would reach certain strips of weld, you know, of steel for them so they could weld it and whatnot. And, uh, then, uh, it got to the point where some of the work would run out, but the, uh, the office that hire, you know the uh CI, what you call it the—the, uh, [short pause] company that hired these unions, you know, for Louisiana and all them different companies like that. Well they had offices here in the city. And one was right here in the [French] Quarter about two blocks [down]. Where if you got laid off on one job—the work run out—you'd go there and you'd get reassigned again, you know, to another project and you know during the War years [World War II]. And, uh, in the meantime I was doing a little landscaping and gardening, you know, on the days that I was off and things like that. Then one day, going into about [nineteen] forty, forty-four it was just a little bit over forty-three going into forty-four, the War started making a change. So the government's beginning to slow down on production and all these plants, you know what I mean, they had these Tommy-guns—working on that and they know'd what was going to happen, so once production started slowing down in the defense plant, so they was laying off quite a few people, you know. And, uh, one of the guys working in the Quarter, I knew him, his name was John Sartin, he was from Mississippi. I can't think of the town he was from but, uh, he had a problem of reading you know and uh, he tell me one day—he used to talk to me 'cause they'd given me a nickname "Professor." **[COUNTER: 10:46]** You know, I used to read so much, and I had a whole lot of answers cause they didn't have such big questions, you know, and I generally had the answer. So they started calling me "Professor," you know. So he say to me, he say one day, he say, "Professor, you can read pretty good," he say, "I—I work in the Quarter at the 500 Club on Bourbon and St. Louis," he say, uh, "I can get you a job working with me, you know, as a bar back. You know, get the ice, cut the fruit and do things like that, and then you can, uh, you can learn the

bartending business too. You can help me out by reading off the card." See, he had a good memory of things that went into the drinks, but when the girls came in with all their fancy writing in a hurry, he couldn't read what it—what the drink was, you see.

AE: Hmm.

MS: So that where I stood by him and, uh, whenever they came in there with some kind of drink, whatnot, I would tell him what it was, and then he would—then he could make it, you know, and things like that. So by sticking with him for a little time I was able to be—able to read some of the bartender's book. And then watching some of things he made, I was able to learn, you know, quite a few drinks. Now this was at the, uh, 500 Club at Bourbon and St. Louis. And that was the first bartending job that I had, working with this fella. So I finally learned it. It—

AE: What kind of club was that?

MS: Hmm?

AE: What kind of bar was that?

MS: It was—it was, um, a bar where they had entertainment. They had the Basin Street Six that was a band ca—local band called the Basin Street Six. And it was owned by, uh, a lady name, uh, Mary Lee Kelly [for a time]. Now she was—I think she was from Florida. She lived on Biscayne Boulevard there in Florida, and she owned some clubs over in the [Panama] Canal Zone—[in] Colon and Balboa [port cities in Panama]. Over there she owned some clubs. She also owned one that they called Kelly's Ritz. Some people might be familiar with that, if they went out through the Panama area. This been many years, she was much older than me, she'd be about one hundred and twenty-five now, one hundred and thirty right now, while she was living. But she passed away a few years ago. But she owned the club and, uh, [short pause] she decided to sell the club. So she sold it to a gentleman named Leon Primer and Joe Segretti, these two gentlemen. And they bought the club and she, uh, told them, say uh, "When uh, I open up my private club," which she was planning on opening up a private club up across from Antoine's. And she said she was going to name it Club Kelsto. Now her name was Kelly, her husband was named Stouffer, see, so she put that together and called it Club Kelsto, a private membership club. So she told them, say, "When, uh, when I open up the club [and] they send the agreement, I want Martin to come tend bar for me." I said, "Would they agree to this?" So the day that there was a transaction of sale, cause she was going to move out—'cause she—she lived up over their building, she going to move out there across the street until they fixed this club for her that she had—the building she had bought across from Antoine's. So I was inside the club doing some cleaning up, so the lawyers call me and ask me he say, uh, "We need a witness to the transaction," 'cause she was selling it to Mr. Primer and Mr.

uh—uh—Joe Segretti. So I was onliest one in the building but so they asked me would I come—well I was—I didn't want to sign it 'cause I didn't know what I was signing [chuckling] you know? So they all talked to me and explained to me that they just wanted a witness to that sale, you know, the transaction of the sale. So I agreed to that. So I signed, you know, to make it—to make the sale complete. Then she opened up the club. So in the meantime, I left from, uh, the 500 Club, and I started working across the street while she was getting this club, uh, ready you know. And I started working at the Casino Royal. They used to call it the Stormy Casino Royal—she [Stormy] was an entertainer, was very famous. And, uh, if you recall, I think she, uh, went to LSU [Louisiana State University] or somewhere to some kind of gathering and I think, if I'm not mistaken, somebody took and threw her in the pool over there or something like that. Which gave the club more publicity 'cause people from all over the country were—wanted—wanted to come to see Stormy. She was a—a dancer, you know, on the stage. At this, uh, Casino Royal they had about eight or nine girls or more, you know. A continuous show, one girl behind the other one, you know. There was always a show going on. So I stayed there and worked that bar there a while. **[COUNTER: 15:55]** But when I was over at the 500 Club one year in nineteen-forty nine, um, Mister Primer used to come at the end of the se—well somewhere along the season when they disband the band, and, uh, he had asked—asked me, he said, uh, "Martin," he say uh, "I'm expecting Louis Armstrong to come and knock on the side gate." Now this was in nineteen forty-nine on a Friday night. That Tuesday of the following week was Mardi Gras. And Armstrong was going to be the King of Zulu because he had a membership card—a lifetime membership card. And uh, so uh, Primer, uh, when he told me this I said, "Okay, I'll be listening for him," because the service bar was right back toward the gate, right on St. Louis Street you know, the service bar. But they had another long bar that ran along from St. Louis to—to Bourbon, you know, a long bar for customers, you know. So the waitresses had to come to the back part of the bar where we were to get their drinks. So I told him, "I'll be listening." Now he brought Jimmy Vincent, which was their drummer and Sam Butell he—he was a saxophone player. I don't know if you ever heard of him, he was good too. And uh, they would play with the regular Basin Street Six Band, you know, numbers. Now they had a—a stage that came out just like a drawer, you know when you pull a drawer and the level—the level part is up to the drawer? Well the stage went in, and whenever they had the girls entertain, Johnny—the fella I'm talking about now—had to go and pull the stage out. And, uh, when you—when you get on the other side and you get on top of stage the people start clapping [clapping his hands] to you to start sing or dance or do something. And Johnny, he didn't have no talent whatsoever. So it was embarrassing to him to get—to go over on the other side, because the chairs—you had to get back on the stage to come back over to go to the—the service bar. So he told *me* to go on that side. So I was a little dancer 'cause we used to dance in our neighborhood with a little tin-can band, you know. So I decided to go over there on the other side. So when I got on the stage, they would start clapping [claps two times] and the band would go into "Tea for Two" [starts

to sing the melody] *Doo-da-do*, and I'd do a little tap dance number, and they would just throw money all on the stage for me, you know. So I—I'd gather all that up. But they had two little fellas, one that was called Pork Chop and one that was called Kidney Stew that danced at most of these clubs in the [French] Quarter. And, um, they was friends of mine. We used to get together and go up to the Dew Drop, that was a club—a nightclub uptown there, so I wasn't actually dancer you know, per se, but I did that occasionally when I'd cross over. I didn't do it every time I got on there, but the band would play anyway, you know. But, uh, sometimes I would, sometimes I wouldn't. And, um, so anyway, after—after I um, get to back to Louis—Louis Armstrong. So finally the knock came on the gate about—maybe about an hour after, and I went out there and opened the gate up, there was Louis Armstrong, his wife, another fella that owned a nightclub on, um, his name was, uh, [tapping feet] oh, it's going to come to me. Anyway, there was about four of them that came—came in. So—so he told me, he say, "Let me know when he—when he get here." Now the people—now the Quarter is packed because it's a few days before Mardi Gras. It's just packed everywhere. Floor shows that usually lasted an hour or so, people—there was so many people in town that wanted to go into these different shows. Some of the places cut the show down to a half an hour, you know. Have the act cut down and all like to keep more people coming in an out, you know. And, uh, the people on our side saw Armstrong, you know, when he came in, but the people sitting there didn't know this. But they heard all the banging and all that on the outside. You know, people trying to come in because they saw Armstrong, you know. And, uh, so I told Primer, I said, "Mr. Primer, he's here." He said, "Okay." So he did his number and then finally said, uh, I say to uh—Primer say, uh—uh Louis Armstrong, I say to him—I say uh, "What about talking a picture with me?" you know. He said, "Sure." So he put it his arm on my shoulder and then there was his wife and Johnny, the bartender I told you [about] from Mississippi. Oh, and the guy was named Turk that was with him, that owned a club somewhere on St. Louis Street, I think. On, uh, St. Bernard Avenue, I think. Anyway, he took the picture. Now the girl that takes the picture—they takes so many pictures, that they go to this studio wherever it is over in the Quarter, and then they get them developed, then they bring them back to you. So Armstrong was able to sing his—a couple songs when Mr. Primer say, "Ladies and Gentlemen" [he] say, "I want you all to meet a very good dear friend of mine. He left New Orleans and made it great in the musical world." So the people in there didn't know what he was talking about, you know, but they [are] waiting. And then finally he said, "Meet Mister Louis Armstrong." And he walked up on the stage. Boy, and that crowd that was in there, and the ones outside that knew he was in there, you talk about some noise! Oh, my goodness, they screamed.

[COUNTER: 21:58]

AE: [Laughs.]

MS: So Armstrong, now Louis Primer's [?] trumpet was on the piano. So they thought Armstrong was, you know, bought a trumpet or something like that, but he didn't, he sung a few songs like, he sung, "Sleepy Time Down South" and two or three other numbers that he was famous for [gentleman talking in the background]. Then he—but when he got off the stage and left and shook my hand and was gone, about an half an hour later that girl came back with the pictures, so he never did see the picture. And over the years I—I done hid it from myself. I've been trying—

AE: [Laughing.]

MS: —I tell people about this and they wants to see this picture. This is nineteen forty-nine. They want to see the picture, and they don't want to see it no better than I want to find it, you know what I mean.

AE: [Laughs]

MS: Because I try to cut out everything I can on Armstrong and things like that, you know. So, I don't know, I think I—I got the picture, I just got to realize that I done hid it from my own self, you know what I mean.

AE: [Laughing]

MS: But it's a beautiful picture.

AE: I can only imagine.

MS: So I'll end up probably getting it back. Well anyway, I, um, break over at the Casino Royal, and then she got her club ready. She built a bar in there. A guy named George come and built the bar. A then I started working for her. [Man heard coughing in background] I worked for her a few years. And then from there, I went to Brennan's, [man heard talking in background] and I worked for them, I guess fifteen, sixteen years at Brennan's. That—that was a job that they had plenty of business. Plenty of business. Twelve, fourteen-hundred people on a Sunday—sixteen hundred. And I used to have to make the milk punch for 'em, and—Brandy Milk Punch. And, uh, gin fizz and Bloody Marys. At that time we had to make them up. They was selling so much of it that we had to make 'em in five gallon cans and put them in the cooler. That was how busy that was, you know. And on Sunday was the biggest day—big, big, Sunday brunch—Sunday breakfast. And, uh, it got so busy, we got these, uh, containers, you know like when you go push you glass and than stuff come out? They had to build them [laughs], and I had to keep them filled up with milk punch and Blood Marys. Seventeen hundred people sometimes—sixteen hundred.

AE: My goodness.

MS: So I stayed over there for about sixteen years or so. But then, uh, one of the fellas named, uh, they hired a fella that worked with me named, uh, Robert Johnson. He started working with me, and uh, when he quit from from over there at Brennan's, he came over here [to the Rib Room at the Royal Orleans Hotel]. Now, when I was at Brennan's, the hotel over here wasn't built. This here [where the Rib Room is now] was just a parking lot, and right on the corner of St. Louis and Royal there was log—a little log cabin that sold pralines and—you know, a little small thing. It was tiny. No where near as big as this. About half this size. And they sold a little bit because business wasn't that great down there then.

[COUNTER: 25:15]

AE: Half the size of this room you mean?

MS: Hmm?

AE: Half the size of this room you were saying?

MS: Yes, 'bout half the size of this room. [The interview took place in a private dining room, which was about ten feet square in size, downstairs from the Rib Room's main dining room]

AE: Oh, my goodness.

MS: The little log cabin, wasn't much—

AE: [Laughs]

MS: —wasn't much business going on. And, uh, on the corner right there with the little log cabin, over here by the Touché [Bar] where you interviewed Mike [Michael Santucci].

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: There was a brick wall that ran from Royal Street to Chartres. Nothing but a wall about fifteen feet high—twelve, fifteen feet high. Just a solid wall. At the back-end was some of the construction from the old St. Louis Hotel that was built on this ground before weather, hurricane, storm, neglect, had it torn down. So this was just a ca—cabin, the wall going all the way over there and the back part. If you go out the back door [of the Royal Orleans] where you came in, you'll see a frame a—a part of the old St. Louis Hotel still there.

AE: Oh, really?

MS: So they built this around it. Built this hotel and left [part of that old wall] there.

AE: Okay.

MS: So it's still there. But other than that, this was just a big open spot.

AE: Huh. And so what year was it that this opened up and you started working?

MS: Well here—this hotel is forty-four years old. So you'd have to do a little figuring to break down when it—figure when—it was a lot. And uh, so Robert, he came over here when the old hotel opened up—the one that was working with me. And, uh, I had decided to take it easy for a while, for five or six months and don't do anything but a little landscaping—little gardening that I had been doing. And, uh, he asked me one day, this was about nine months after I had left Brennan's, he said, "Why don't you come over to the Royal Orleans and work?" So he—he—he learned a little bit of bartending by working with me, you know. He wasn't a bartender before that I—you know, can recall. Well anyway, I came over one day, I must have been fifty years old at that time and, uh, he introduced me to, uh, I think the—I don't know if the gentlemen's name, Mr. Neff? I can't recall his name. I don't want y'all to call him the wrong name. Well, anyway he asked Robert, he said, "Do you think, um, he can, um, make it as a bartender?" So, he said, "He should. He taught me what I know." He was assistant to—to the food and beverage man, you know. So, uh, that's the way I started working at the hotel. They put me up on the pool, and I had to work the pool bar. That was, uh, sort of uh, nick-and-tuck type thing. When the weather got bad—I had a portable thing I used to roll out with the liquor on it, you know. And when the weather got bad I had to take all the liquor and put it back on there and roll it into the little room they got up there, you know. So I stayed up there a little—little time, th—then they would transfer me from one bar to another. So, they had a bar up there, the Esplanade Lounge bar [at the Royal Orleans], I worked that. Then at worked the bar that Mike [Michael Santucci at Touché Bar] works. But I did most of the work on the Rib Room. Most the work that I did was on the Rib Room. [Tapping feet lightly]

AE: Can we back up, um, a little bit to your time at the 500 Club and talk about the drinks that you served there and what was popular at the time?

MS: Well the 500 Club wasn't famous for no particular drink. Mostly they served a highball. They—it wasn't the bar. Most of the people during them time they wasn't drinking as many famous drinks. Once in a while somebody might ask for a Hurricane or something. But mostly it was bourbon and Coke, vodka and this, or something like that. There wasn't too much fancy drinks at them times. Fact now-a-days they got so much of them out there, you can't keep up with them, you know.

AE: How do you think that happened?

MS: Hmm?

AE: How do you thing that happened?

MS: Well, these youngsters start coming up with ideas of mixing certain things together, so after a period of time it ends up—some of them end up in books, some of them don't. You know, sometimes it takes years before they ever end up in a book. And then somebody got to be writing a—a mix book and pick this drink up and put it in it, you know. So most of these drinks—some of them are done mouth to mouth [get popular by word of mouth]. They're not in books all of them, because they come up with them right and left, man!

AE: Right.

MS: They'd be at they house or at a party they get together, and they start mixing things, and they name it and they—they come around [and] before you know it, it spreads around the neighborhood, you know. At the bars you know.

AE: Yeah.

[COUNTER: 30:00]

MS: But they come in there with certain drinks I never heard of. It'd be things they done got together. Some of them know what goes in 'em, some of them don't. Some of them will say, "I think that it's got so-and-so in it," and then they change their minds and order something else, you know. They'd be wanting it, but they don't know what went in it because they didn't pay enough attention or ask, you know. But plenty of the bars have things to make those drinks. But when the customer comes in and asks for it, it might be the first time the bartender [has] heard of it. He might say that, "Well, we may have the ingredients, and if you know what's in it, we'll make it for you." They say, "No, I think they got such-and-such a thing in it, but I ain't too sure." So that's gone.

AE: Yeah.

MS: That's—that's passed.

AE: What do you think about the history of New Orleans as far as a drinking town? And—and the drinks like the Sazerac and the gin—Ramos Gin Fizz and things like that?

MS: Well, I think, um, from what I understand, I think they both originated over at the Roosevelt Hotel. I think there was a fella named Ramos and—that made that. Now the Sazerac, which is the—the old Roosevelt Hotel had a bar they call the Sazerac Bar. I haven't kept up with it; [I] don't know if it

still exists. I assume it do. Years ago they used to make the Sazerac from brandy, from what I understand. And, uh, they got all kind of stories about the Sazerac. Some of them say that they had so much of Rye whiskey 'til they started using rye instead of the brandy in the Sazerac. So after I'm reading one time where they used brandy and they used rye—old, old, old rye, I decided to use the both of them instead of making it from one. You know, the old one from brandy and then the new one from the rye. So what I do now, I use the both of them in mine. Sort of taking two worlds, you know, and making them both a thing. And it goes over pretty good. Most people like it. I've got some customers that come in and look for me to make them 'em for 'em, you know. They'll ask if I'm here. Sometimes they find out if I'm here and then they—at the table they order it, you know what I mean? Other than that, sometimes they won't order unless they know that I'm there to make it, you know what I mean? Things like that.

AE: So you're, I would guess then, probably the only person in New Orleans who does that that way. Would you think?

MS: Yeah, I don't think too many of them use brandy and rye together. They use a—either rye or they use Jack Daniel's or something, you know, ordinary. But I don't think that too many of them use the rye and the old—old—old rye and the brandy together. So that's the way—of course I put more rye than brandy. See, years ago we used to make it—we used to take, uh, cubed sugar and take the two bitters—Peychaud and Angostura bitters—and dash them on the sugar. See, and that—and then took the sugar with that in there and muddled it, you know, break it down. Sometime we may put a little dash of water to make it liquefied you see, because simple syrup is better than any of these sweet things that they use in drinks. They got several of them that's out [on the market]. But I would prefer to make a good sweet simple syrup, you know, the old-time sugar water, to put in any drink that requires a sugar base, you know. Because it is more smoother, and it's a more natural taste and it have a way of making a drink more enjoyable, when you got that sugar. [Rubs hands together] But well we'll muddle that. I'll—I'll muddle it, and then I'll take [moves glass that's on the table to demonstrate] a glass, and I'll put it in ice. An old-fashioned glass. I'll put it in ice. [The] glass is suppose to be chilled [pounding table]. Then I take my rye—the way I'm doing it—the way I'm doing it now because I don't use the mashed up sugar. I use a syrup now, instead of going through the muddling and the sugar, you know. I take the, um, the two bitters, and I put them in there, and I put the rye and the brandy. Then I—while the glass is chilling, I stirs this around. I don't shake it; I stir it. And it's never served on ice, unless the customer requests it. I stir it around, and it's supposed to—in my opinion, it's supposed to have a brownish-reddish-looking color. You know what I mean? Not pale. A brownish-reddish-looking color. And, uh, I take my glass out, and I take Pernod or either Herbsaint, and I pour a little bit in the glass, and I stir it around [rubbing hands together], throw the excess out, then I strain the liquid into the glass, then I take me a lemon twist and twist on top of it and drop it in there. Now I don't rub it around the

edge like some bartenders do, they say [put a] lemon twist in their drink. Some of them rub it around the edge. I don't do it. The lemon have a sting to it and that breaks down the first taste of the Sazerac when you stick it in your mouth. That little oil that's in there, if you notice [when] you take a—a lemon peel and you bend it like that [makes motion with his hand] and scratch a match and bend it, it sparkles. That oil in there make[s] a sparkle. So that oil is sitting in that drink. You can see it on top of the drink, you know. But running the edge around there, that stings it a little bit. [G]ives it a little burning sensation, so you don't need that. But the oil dropped in there, and the lemon dropped in there, that's perfect. That's good.

[COUNTER: 35:52]

AE: Uh-hmm. Well, when did you start making your famous Mint Julep that I've had the pleasure of experiencing?

MS: W—Well I was making it over at Brennan's, but it wasn't like over here. Over here they—they go for it so—so gratefully, you know what I mean. And uh, perhaps I might do that a little differently then, you know, some places. I try not t—t—t—to break the mint up too much as—as—as less as possible, you know. But I do take a muddling stick, and I muddle it a little bit. And I put about, I would say roughly about a tablespoon-and-a-half of sugar. You see, it doesn't dissolve all the way, you know, after you've muddled it [rubs hands together] and stirred it with your spoon and all. But when you're drinking a drink, there's always a little amount of sugar down at the bottom. And you just take your straw and stir it around and bring the drink flavor back again, you know what I mean?

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: Yeah. Powdered sugar, you put that in there and it goes away, and that's the end of it. You know, it's gone through the drink. So what I do, after I muddle it and put my crushed ice and then my liquor and then whip it up a little more. See, if the mint is too small, sometimes you can't help from a little-bitty piece [getting caught in the straw]. Sometimes it may so happen, you know. But if it's too small, that mint comes up—right up to the straw, right up into they tongue, and that mint have a sting to it. You see, and that sort of makes a difference in the drink. So if you can avoid muddling it too much, you know, don't pulverize it whatsoever. But, uh, after you build it all the way up, you keep putting ice 'til you build it up. You put about—maybe a couple ounces of bourbon. Then you whip it up good in a Tom Collins-type glass, and then you put ice on top it until you build it up, then you float a little brandy on top of it, then you put your cherry and an orange and you get your little bouquet like [of mint] and get powdered sugar on it and stick it in there and there you are. Now if you want to do like I showed you afterward, you take—you put [the glass] in your crushed iced, and you make it in the crushed ice [mimes act of packing crushed ice around a glass and taps the glass on the table]. But when you get the glass out you

got to ice like that [stuck to the outside of the glass], so you got to knock it. See by whipping it while it's in the crushed ice, the glass froths [chills]. That makes the ice stick to it, see. And then when you take it out, you knock it off and leave as much ice as—as you feel like you want to have on it. Then take a saucer. A flat one like this, not the one with the thing [ring] in it because it might slip and fall, flat, put a napkin. But I don't do that much now. It's—It's, you know, I get the call for too many of them and they—that's—

AE: Yeah.

MS: —time consuming.

AE: Yeah.

MS: But once and awhile I do that for the people, you know, when it's not too busy, you know what I mean. Because once some people see the Mint Julep they say, "What's that?" and you say, "Mint Julep." They hadn't heard of it in a good while, "That's what I want."

AE: Yeah.

MS: See, and that's time consuming.

AE: Well it's really impressive visually. It's a beautiful drink.

MS: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

AE: And you can take—you take pride in all that, I can tell.

MS: Oh, yeah. Well, doing it for over sixty years, I guess that have—you do have some kind of devotion to it. You can't help it, you know. It just comes natural you know, or whatever.

AE: Do you have other drinks that you like to make?

MS: Well, um, I like to make Whiskey Sours, Planter's Punch. I got a drink here [flipping through a small booklet that he brought with him] that, um, [short pause as he looks through the booklet] we had a contest—the Omni Hotel had a contest of drinks. And uh, each one of the hotels had to have their bartenders make a drink. And the food and beverage managers and a couple other officials was going to test each bartender's drink. And the one that they think was top would go into a contest to the Omni Hotel. And, um, I made a drink, and the Omni put the—put this book out. And they put this book out and they, uh, when it came out, they had my drink in it. And, uh, the hotel's name and—and who made it—where it was made at. Now this is it here, this is it here it's—now you see—this is it. [Turns book around to show interviewer] It's called a Marsaw. See I took my name, Martin—start

[with] my first name. M-A-R for Martin and Sawyer S-A-W, so it's called the Marsaw, and that is it there.

AE: [Reads recipe] Makers Mark Bourbon, Angostura [Bitters], lime juice, and Monin strawberry and almond syrups. "You may forget the name, but you won't forget the drink." [Laughs] [Sound of booklet being passed across table] That's great. Wow.

MS: Uh-huh.

AE: Impressive!

MS: Uh-huh. [Laughs]

[COUNTER: 40:57]

AE: So what do—a lot of people, when they come into the Rib Room, do you have a lot of tourist business or a lot of regulars?

MS: Well, they—it's got it—it's got it both. Most places got both. But like restaurants, they got lawyers, doctors, people of everyday life come in. And plenty of tourists. We have tourists staying in the hotel, you know, and they come down and have dinner and make reservations, you know. So we got it all around. We get it all around at the hotel.

AE: Yeah. Well, and you've been—

MS: Uh-hmm. And we get so many repeats at the Royal Orleans Hotel—people? And then some of them that be sitting at the bar, you know, you—you talk to `em, ask them where they from. They like that—to talk to you about where they from, they enjoy that.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: I had one—one customer that had reported me that I didn't ask them where they was from [laughs].

AE: [Laughing] Oh, no.

MS: [Laughing] They wanted conversation, but you don't know all this, you know. But you try to talk as many of them, you know, and that's—that's important when you talk to them and ask them where they're from. So I learned a whole lot about some of them's towns and whatnot, so when the next one comes in here from there, I can talk a little bit about their town—

AE: Sure.

MS: —and whatnot. And people enjoy that, you know what I mean, they like to talk, you know, and things like that.

AE: You get some good stories from people who come through your bar?

MS: Hmm?

AE: Do you hear some good stories from people who come to your bar?

MS: Not too much, not too much. They be looking for you to tell them things—

AE: [Laughs].

MS: —more than them telling you, [laughing] you know what I mean. That's the way that is.

AE: Well you've been at this a long time. What is it that you like about bartending?

MS: Well [short pause] I don't know. T—T—To look at it in the way that, uh, I started learning how to mix these things, you know, together, um, and meeting people and talking to people and learning things. Because I stopped in schooling in sixth grade. And, uh, I guess I was around fifteen years old. That's like I was telling you, that they started us to school at any age that the family could send you at, you know. And that would—made me a little embarrassed, you know. And, uh, I always was a pretty good reader, you now what I mean. I wasn't so great in math. I was pretty good. I did enough to get along with, but I—I wanted to be somebody smarter than that. I liked the way the figures come up you know, and whatnot, you know. But, uh, I liked the bartending because I was able to meet a whole lot of people and talk to a whole lot of people. I met, you know, different entertainers and different musicians. You know, some of them was off of Bourbon Street that was famous. Some of them was from out of town, and I got a chance to meet them, you know, and things like that. I met Sid Catholic. He was a great drummer with Armstrong. And, uh, I met, uh, Pete—Pete Harmon his name was. Mister Pete Harmon he was, at one time, he was the Bantam Weight Champion of the World. He lived around on—on Conti Street. I met him. See, I met a few entertainers. Some of the girls, I met Bob—Bob Avery. I don't know if you now him he was a singer, his—one of his songs was "Blue Eyes" that he made famous. I met him. I met Lilly Christine, that was the Cat Girl [burlesque performer]. I met plenty of the famous girls that was on Bourbon Street. And Miss Chris Owens, I knew her—I met her—I knew her—I been knowing her now, you know, since I been working down here I know Miss Chris Owens. She got a club called the Chris Owens Club [& Balcony] right there on Bourbon and Saint Louis [Streets]. I knew her too. [Short pause] And I met Mister Owen Brennan, you know, the

Brennan's—the original man [founder of Brennan's Restaurant]. I met him, he was a nice guy—very friendly.

[COUNTER: 45:01]

AE: Well, Mike [Michael Santucci] was telling me yesterday, that he said you told him that you waited on General De Gaul.

MS: Who?

AE: De Gaul.

MS: Oh yeah, well that was when I was at Brennan's. Uh, the—the mayor at that time was Mayor [de Lesseps] Morrison. And De Gaul, I think he was going to Washington at the time to—to—to do some kind of discussion concerning France and the United States—something. And the Brennan's with the mayor, since New Orleans and France had so much in common, so many—[short pause] they had decide to have De Gaul and his group to stop over in New Orleans before he headed to Washington. And what the Brennan's decided to do, for their publicity point of view, is to give free French Champagne to the general public. So they took Jackson Square—it might rain, but they used Jackson Square, and they build a podium or stage, whatever, right there where Jackson is on the s—s—you seen where Jackson is standing up there [the statue]?

AE: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MS: So they built it right there. And, uh, they was hiring bartenders from all in the area, and they gave them a stand with French Champagne, and they just poured free to the general public while De Gaul make his speech.

AE: My goodness.

MS: So many of us—they told us—the FBI and the Secret Service agents—they told everybody that, uh, they was going to take your name, and they was going to run your names through a computer-type thing, you know what I mean? See if you're wanted. So, if—if you done did anything, [if] you were wanted anywhere, don't sign up [laughing] don't get on there! Because, you know, you might had did something where they still looking for you, and maybe it was something that they done forgotten—[they] don't even worry about it. So all—one guy that, uh, he had an automobile theft charge on him, but they did worry about it. It had been a long time ago and so—but they wouldn't let him work on the, uh, champagne or pour or nothing. So I was assigned to the stage, and, uh, this was around near twelve o'clock in the daytime when, uh, I walked over to De Gaul and a few other dignitaries there with a tray of champagne. And De Gaul reached and got one of the tra—champagnes off my tray. Now, uh, the channel six was next door at that time, next to where the hotel is, you know, the—the where the building

over there [points to his left], that's where channel six was. And the reporter was on Rampart Street there somewhere there so, they got the picture. I've—I've never seen it, but my wife's sister called my wife up and told her, she said, "Hurry up put your TV on your wi—your husband is on the stage."

AE: Oh, my goodness.

MS: So she saw that, but I've never seen it. And he reached and got the champagne off of there.

AE: About what year was that? Was that in the fifties? [Morrison was mayor of New Orleans from 1946-1961]

MS: No, um, I'm not too sure. I don't want to guess the year because, uh, Mayor Morrison was the mayor, so we would have to go back, check with the [Times] Picayune [newspaper] people, you know, to see what day this occasion took place, you know.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: But I was never that interested in it, so I never worried about the date.

AE: Yeah.

MS: That's how I remember that [nineteen] forty-nine, when Armstrong was there. Uh, that I remember.

AE: And so you mentioned your wife. Do you have children?

MS: Uh-hmm. No, my wife passed away on March the ninth, two-oh-two [2002]. But I have, uh, a daughter and a son and two stepsons. They're all grown. They got—they on they own.

AE: Uh-hmm. Yeah.

MS: Except my stepson—uh, my son and my daughter-in-law, they stay with me. My—my daughter stays somewhere else. My other stepson, they got they're own thing going for them, you know.

AE: Um-hmm. So has bartending been a good way to support a family for you?

MS: Hmm?

AE: Has bartending been a good way for you to support a family for you over the years?

MS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well for the last, um, well I say the last twenty years it's gotten better, you know, some of the salary got better. People always tipping you more, and you make a little more money. You know what I'm saying.

AE: Yeah. Is there anything that you don't enjoy about your job?

MS: No, nothing that I don't enjoy about it. But there's one thing, uh, it seems to me the undecided part of the customers sometimes when you ask them—you know, you go to them sometimes and you ask them, "Can I help you?" They don't know what they want, [laughs] so you have stand up there and wait for them to decide.

AE: [Laughs].

[COUNTER: 50:04]

MS: Or if there's three of four of them together, and you go to ask one, can you help him. And he'll say, um, "Ask them, see what they want," -ask them see what they want, you know. So they seem to be undecided some of them and whatnot, you know.

AE: Yeah. Have you over the years taken a vacation at all from work?

MS: Uh, yeah. I take one every—every year that I was due. You know, sometimes I had one week, sometimes two weeks. Then finally it got to where I had a month, so I—I usually take the whole month of August.

AE: Oh, okay.

MS: Now, last year there was a little business, so I had to take it and spot like two weeks and then [take] two weeks a little later.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: Now [short pause] this year, uh, about four months ago, I had—we have what you call "paid time off" where y—you accumulate this time, and you get paid. You take off; you get paid for it. So I took a cruise that time.

AE: Did you?

MS: It took me—took me about eight days or so, and I went on a cruise. I went—we took a bus from here to Florida, around Cape Canaveral, somewhere over in that area. Around the Kennedy Center there, way over there. And, uh, I got on the boat they call Carnival Glory, a big ol' thing. And uh, we went to uh, Saint Thomas, we went to Saint Martin. Oh, what a good time I had!

AE: Wow.

MS: Oh, treated like a king. I didn't know how to act! [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

MS: [Laughing] Had such a good time. But what I enjoyed mostly on the cruise was seven days when that—uh, they had—I gained so much weight. I brought some clothes, and when I got home I couldn't—all the fat come— [laughing] now I can't wear 'em! I'm two inches too big for 'em. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughing]

MS: Well anyway, uh, I um, each level, you know what I mean, you can eat—you can eat all day long if there's somewhere for you to eat, you know And good food at that. And I just over did it, you know what I mean. The best thing is to don't look at it—

AE: [Laughing.]

MS: —cause if you look at it, something is going to attract your attention, you know?

AE: Yep.

MS: And, um, well I like that entertainment, too. You know, certain places had entertainment. Then they had the one place where had the big shows, you know what I mean. Big entertainment. You know, I would go there at night and enjoy that. My family, they tried to keep up with me—

AE: [Laughs]

MS: —about the oldest one—the oldest one. You know, most of my family— must have been about twelve or so that was relatives on this bus—

AE: Oh, wow.

MS: —we took from here. There's a church out in the country there that charters, you know, make charters at these times. And that had about fifty people on there, and I guess about twelve or fourteen of us is in-laws, you know, in one way or the other. They tried to keep up with me cause I was the oldest one—

AE: [Laughs]

MS: They tried to keep on eye on me! [Laughing] I was more alive than they was, you know. So I had to get away from them and enjoy myself like I wanted to! Because they caught themselves trying to watch me. And uh—

uh—uh, you know when you go and get your food you, uh, take and find you somewhere and sit down and enjoy your food. So there was three young ladies that, I think, they looked, and they saw me. They was beckoning me to come sit down by them, you know. I mean they saw me looking for a spot to sit down, you know. So I went and sit down and started talking to them. And, uh, they got real serious about—with me, you know. I mean they wanted to know who I was and who I was on the boat with and all like that. "Did you bring your wife with you?" and all this stuff. [Laughs] So there was three sisters. But they were from Georgia. But they all don't live in Georgia. Maybe one lives in Georgia. The other two live elsewhere. So they called themselves the "Georgia Sisters," you know.

AE: [Short laugh] Uh-huh.

MS: So one time when I was on board, I was passing and the three of them saw me and they did like this [starts waving hand as to call someone over] and I was with two or three more cousins: a couple of womens and a couple of guys. And they said, "Who was that that knew you?" And I said, "I met them." "Oh yeah, you met them, you say?" I said, "Yeah." They said, Well who were they?" I said, "They're the Georgia Sisters." They said, "Well, we going to keep you away from them Georgia Sisters!" [Laughing]

AE: [Laughs] That sounds like one heck of a vacation.

MS: [Still laughing] I had, um, I took me some pictures. I took me a few pictures. But the water in Saint Martin it was—it was too salty for me.

AE: Yeah.

MS: I—oh, I couldn't take that water. But I got in the water and held my hand up and had someone to take my picture of me out in the water.

AE: Yeah?

MS: Then I took some pictures of me coming off the gangplank like, with a wild shirt on and some shorts and things like that.

AE: Uh-hmm.

[COUNTER: 55:07]

MS: But one—one thing I enjoyed when I was on the boat was that at night there was a club that opened up around four [o'clock] at night and, uh [short pause] you could go and smoke cigars. There's a couple places where you could smoke, but I like to go where you can smoke the cigar and blow it out and enjoy it, you know. Not where you—so I'd go in there and sit down, get me a glass of brandy and light my cigar up and enjoy it. They had entertainment. They had a three-piece band, and they was good. A little

three-piece outfit, they was good. A trio? They was good. So I enjoyed it. They had dancing if you wanted to get up and dance and things—stuff like that. So I had a good time. Met people. One thing that surprised me, when I took my vacation from the Royal Orleans for about eight days, I went to play the slot machines. You know, I was putting quarters in it? And I changed from one machine to the other, you know. And then I put a quarter in one of the machines, and I pulled the thing down, and that thing said “Jackpot.” So I—I said, “Jackpot? Oh, my goodness!” So I wouldn’t let nobody come near [laughs]—come round the machine, you know. I said, “Hold it right there.” [Claps his hands together once] Come to find out, you either put two quarters, one quarter, or three, either way. I had only put one quarter. Had I put two quarters—playing it for two quarters—I’d a had the jackpot.

AE: Oh, man.

MS: I don’t know what it was, but that’s what happened to me. The guy came up—you know the floor manager that runs the machines and checks everything? He came and he explained to me. And the thing, he say, “One, two, or three quarters,” and I was putting one in there. If I’d had been doing it with two? [Laughs] I was playing it real careful-like, you know.

AE: Uh-huh.

MS: But I—I could afford to, but I—I wasn’t dealing that way. I was putting one and—two quarters, and I’d a hit the jackpot. Not that would have been plenty of money. That was—

AE: [Laughing] Could have retired on that, huh?

MS: That was the surprising thing to me. But the hotel itself? [Sound of Martin tapping a plate on the table] Yeah, I like the hotel. I meet a whole lot of people at the Royal Orleans. People that come from all over Louisiana, you know, Texas, plenty of them know me real well, you know.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: One time a customer came in, he—he was from Houston, and he—I was at the bar, and he came in and he said, “Martin,” he said, “we come down here ever so often.” And I said, “Oh yeah, I know. I take care of you every time you come to New Orleans, here at the hotel.” He said, “Yeah.” He said, “But, uh, I’m—my wife and I are going to leave, but I’m coming back and [going to] talk to you—coming back to the hotel and talk to you.” I said, “Okay.” So he came back to the hotel [sound of Martin wiping off the tablecloth in front of him] and he said to me—and he said, “Martin, I know it won’t be easy for you to do,” he said, “but do you think that I could work it out that the Royal Orleans hotel would let you come to Houston for me.” I say, uh, “Well what is it that you want done?” I said, “Because I have, you

know, days off. You know, I mean maybe, you know—" I said, "When is this going to take place?" He said, "In August." I said, "Well, August is my vacation month, you know." I said, "That's when the Royal Orleans gives me my month vacation." I said, "Now, what [do] you need?" He said, "I've got a birthday party—mine." And he say, "I'd like to fly you to Houston to work it." He say, "I'll take you and your wife, fly y'all there and put y'all up in a hotel room for three days."

AE: Oh, my goodness.

MS: So I said, "Well," I say, "I'll be on my vacation. " I say, "I can make it. I'll talk to my wife and see what she thinks." Well, she don't like flying. I knew that was out, but I wasn't going to tell him that right then, you know.

AE: Uh-huh.

[COUNTER: 59:11]

MS: So he says, "Well, seems like I got that much going." He say, "But my wife was doubtful that I—I would get you to come there to work a party for me," you know. Said, "But she's going to be surprised when I tell her that it worked out okay." So anyway, my daughter and her boyfriend, he got one of them Suburbans, big ol' blue and silver Suburban. So they say, "Well, we'll drive you there." So I talked to him. And, uh, I say, uh—His name was Mark Smith. I said "Mister Smith, I can get someone to bring me there." He said, "If you can't," he say, "you can take the bus, and we'll pay you for that, and I'll have my son to meet you at the station." So I said, "My daughter and her boyfriend are driving me there." I say—I say, uh—he say, uh, "How much money would they want to bring you here?" I said, "He said three-hundred and fifty dollars to bring me there and bring me back." And he said, "Okay, and I'll put him up in a hotel room too." And I said, "Okay." So it worked out that way. My daughter drove me all the way to Houston.

AE: Oh, my goodness.

MS: She drove completely there. Got there on a Thursday and, uh, that thing was [on] a Saturday. And he had it—had me paid up to Monday—had it paid up to Monday at the hotel. The, uh—trying to think of the hotel it was. Anyway, uh, when I got there he had our name there at the desk [pounding on the table] you know what I mean. We just had to show our identification, and that was it, so that came out okay.

AE: What was the party like? Where you making fancy drinks?

MS: It was his birthday. Yeah, most—the—the only drink I had to make was Margaritas, basically. The rest of them was all normal drinks. But, you know, they're right there in Texas and they drink them Margaritas in Texas and Mexico so—

AE: Uh-huh.

MS: They must drink quite a few Margaritas there in Houston. But it's a big city.

AE: Oh, yeah. I'm from Houston, actually.

MS: Yeah? I looked around. I took a walk with my cigar, and I didn't see much [city] buses, you know. I mean, that's—that's something. I—I didn't see hardly any buses, you know.

AE: Yeah.

MS: You don't have them much, you know, like here you find buses running all around.

AE: Oh, yeah. Sure.

MS: Yeah. It's different.

AE: Well that's a good customer to fly you—or send you all the way from New Orleans to Houston.

MS: New Orleans, yeah. He had—he had the catering people.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: That, uh, that catered. The caterers, you know, for—and there was help. I didn't have to bring my daughter and s—she was at the hotel or wherever they go—went. But he had—the catering people had help. You know, like the glasses—kept the glasses off the bar. So the only thing I had to do was maybe shake up a Margarita. The rest of the drinks was just like highballs. Now, here's what put the icing on the cake. After I was there about an hour—because he told me it was going to last from five [o'clock] to about ten [o'clock at night]. I was waiting on a whole lot of people, and I saw a gang of them standing up looking at me, you know. And, uh, about after an hour or so, he came back to the bar, behind the bar where I had made my set-up. He said, "Martin," he say, "you know one thing?" I say, "What's that?" He said, "There are about twenty-five or thirty people that you've been waiting on at the Royal Orleans Hotel, and they say man, you done made my day for me."

AE: Oh, my goodness.

MS: They say, "Martin?" Said, "We've been knowing Martin." See, because I wore my jacket on with my name on it.

AE: Uh-huh.

MS: I—I was talking to the personnel guy [at the Royal Orleans], and I told him what I was going to do. He said, "Yeah, you can wear the—you can wear the uniform there with the nametag on and whatnot." And then some of them started coming back to the bar, shake my hand and say, "Martin, I'm glad to see you here. But how this guy can get you to come way out here, I couldn't figure out.""

AE: Oh, my goodness.

MS: So he loved that. So that sort of did something nice for him.

AE: And for you. That's a loyal following you have.

MS: Oh, yeah, it did nice for me. So when we got ready to go back, he—he told me, said "Well, we're going to a dinner." So many of them, you know, going to a dinner. Not the group but so many in—going to a dinner. He said, "Your going to have to go back." He said, "And I ain't going to be able to bring you back." He said, " But I'm going to make the a check for four hundred dollars, and I'm going to give you fifty dollars cash, so you can pay that cab driver to bring you back." So they called me a cab. He said, "Take you some beer or whatever you want." So I brought some beer back over to the hotel to watch TV and drink a little bit. And I had a little container that kept the beer cold for me, you know.

AE: Uh-huh

MS: So that happened. So I stayed there. My son and daughter—my—my—my daughter and her boyfriend had to be to work for Monday. So I left with them Sunday. Called him up and told him I was going to leave on Sunday. So I came back with them.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: So everything came out all right. He tried to get me to come for another—christening or something he was having, but my wife got the numbers all mixed up—and they got several exchange—telephone exchanges in Houston, you know, like we got.

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: Like we in the five-oh-four [area code], they got so many in Houston—

AE: Uh-hmm.

MS: —so it was mixed up and [we] wasn't able to make contact, so I didn't get to work for him again. But I think he had a christening going on, and it

didn't—it p—it panned out. It didn't work good, or I'd have end[ed] up going back again.

AE: Well what is—do you remember what this man drinks when he comes to the bar here? Does he have a regular drink?

[COUNTER: 65:00]

MS: No, I think—I think he drinks wine, but I ain't too sure. But it's been about three years ago, so I can't quite remember. But some of the customers, I remember what they drink, you know. Some of them when they walk into the door I say, "The usual?" They say, "Yeah." So some of them I know what they want. Yeah, some of them that call when they get to they room and whatnot and want to know if I'm here.

AE: Yeah.

MS: "Is Martin here?" "Yeah," and then they come on down. Yeah, I got quite a bit of followers, you know, that come to the hotel. All from around Shreveport, Alexandria, uh, Houma [all towns in Louisiana], all—all through there. Baton Rouge, all those country towns, they come in there on the weekend. Thibodaux, they come in on the weekend. Some of them from across there. Over the years, you know, like thirty-four years is a long time. Then there's some people I wait on before I came to the Royal Orleans. I knew them from over at Brennan's, you know what I mean? Some of them.

AE: Then they followed you over here?

MS: Uh-hmm.

AE: Well and I heard too—and I think it was Mike telling me—Mike was talking a lot about you yesterday. [Laughs] But that you were in—

MS: Well that keeps the weight off of him, you know. [Quiet laugh]

AE: [Laughs] —that you were in a Southern Comfort add. Is that right?

MS: They—the Southern Comfort people had came here and, uh, the food and beverage manager told me that, uh, they was gonna do the interview. They wanted me to make something—a couple drinks out of Southern Comfort. So I made a Southern Comfort, uh, [pounding table while thinking], uh, Mint Julep, and a Southern Comfort Old Fashioned, and I made another drink. And they took the pictures of that, and they was going to show it in Germany. But what happened, after they left—we did it up on the pool up there [at the Royal Orleans]—after they left—they asked me a couple questions and whatnot—but after they left, they sent a picture back, but it wouldn't show on they—they—they machine [computer].

AE: Hmm.

MS: So I gave it back to the girl that was working with them out of Germany, and they sent another picture back. They say, uh, party—Southern Comfort Party [on it], so I brought it—brought that one home. I thought it had all that on it. But when they—when my son put it in the machine [computer], it said [that] it doesn't work on this machine.

AE: Oh, no.

MS: So the first one that I sent back probably work—do work but certain machines you have to put it on. The disc, you know. You have to put it on a certain machine.

AE: That's a shame.

MS: So I got the last one, see, the party at home. And I got to find the thing and see what's on it. I don't know if that's on it the—the interview up there on the pool. There was a whole lot of kids—college kids that was with them doing this testing, you know. And I talked to them and made them drinks and whatnot. Got introduced to them and whatnot, and they asked me how long I had been here and a couple of things like that.

AE: Yeah.

MS: How old I was, was I born in New Orleans, some of the things I like about New Orleans. I say, "The weather's all right with me, I like to go to Audubon Park, and I like to come out in New Orleans." I say, "The thing about it is that all you have to do is just come out in the [French] Quarter and enjoy yourself." So that was some of the words that was on there.

AE: Do you pour much Southern Comfort at your bar out here?

MS: Hmm?

AE: Do you pour much Southern Comfort?

MS: Yeah, they got some people that will ask for Southern Comfort Sours, and some of them ask for Old Fashioneds—Southern Comfort. But most people, they say an Old Fashioned. But if they want a scotch Old Fashioned, they ask for a scotch Old Fashioned, which is—they call it a Rob Roy. That's the scotch Old Fashioned.

AE: And—

MS: Come to find out all them years I was making Rob Roys, I didn't know he was a [real] guy. [Rob Roy MacGregor, the 17th century outlaw hero from Scotland] [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs.]

MS: You know? And they tell me he was—tell me he was like a—a—like a roustabout or a—you know, like a crook or something, I don't know. Say he did things, you know, that wasn't all that legit, you know. I didn't know all this about Rob Roy. [Laughs] All them drinks I made with his name, you know. He was from England, I think. I think he was from England, I ain't too sure. I had read something on—a little bit on his background, but I ain't too sure whether he was from England or not. But the—the hotel—the hotel has been pretty good to me. I mean, I've been here all these years, and I get paid, and they help—the employees, they help me, you know, plenty of times.

AE: Yeah.

MS: See what I want. I—I'm the oldest one here in age, you know, and, uh—

AE: Do you think there will come a day when you decide to retire?

MS: Huh? I'm working on it. I—when I—when I do it, it's gonna be a two week's notice, and then I'm gonna tell—tell them. One time I mentioned that I was planning on leaving the hotel. That's—I told them that, uh, I was gonna retire, so—and it—it got spread all through the neighborhood [short pause] that Martin's retiring. "Martin's retiring!" And people would walk up to me and say, "I heard you're retiring." See, I don't want to start that no more, you see.

AE: [Laughs] **[COUNTER: 70:16]**

MS: You know what I mean? [Laughs] I'll leave that alone. [Short pause] Because they've called me all kinds of things. Some call me "Professor," some call me "Prof," some say, "Mister Sawyer, Mister Martin," all like that. The name, uh, "Professor" came on me many years ago when I was a kid. We used to—they had people [that] used to sell—stone coal by the buckets, you know. You'd buy ten cents or a nickel. Wood, you got twelve sticks of wood for a nickel. That's when they had these fire grates. Firehalf [?] as they called them. And, uh, we—the wood yard we called it, that sold stone coal and wood, and we'd sit around the fire and, uh, inside the little house over there where they sold the stuff at. Inside that little tent. And one of the guys came in with some great big old glasses on, you know. And a guy named Fred Campbell looked at him and said, "Man, where'd you get those big old glasses from?" So I told him I said, "Those are bifocals." He said, "Bifocals? What you know about bifocals?" I say, uh, "Benjamin Franklin invented those. He had an eye problem, and he invented those bifocals." So the guy named Freddie Campbell [said], "Oh, you don't know what you're talking about." I say, "Okay, well you check, and then you let me know tomorrow when we're sitting in here." And so the next day he came in, he must have

found out from somebody. And he said, "You was right. Benjamin Franklin did invent them glasses, *Professor!*" [Said with loud emphasis] he said, you see. And that name stuck. [Laughing]

AE: [Laughs]

MS: They started calling me Professor and that. Well, the funny thing, sometimes there's be an argument over in the, uh, bars in the neighborhood, you know, and they'd come knock on my door for answers [knocks on table a few times], you know, and most of the time I had the answer. I'll never forget, I was delivering groceries one time. And I had a basket of groceries and I had—and I had—I had a dozen eggs like this [cradled under his arm with one hand] and I had the handlebars like [holding them with the other hand] this because I didn't want to put [the eggs] in the basket because I know they would move and crack with all the stuff in there. And they had the Claiborne streetcar running at the time, and I'm riding my bicycle. Some guy on the street hollered, "Oh, Professor!" And I turned to wave at that guy. [Motions lifting his arm that's holding the eggs to wave at the man that called to him, and the eggs fall]

AE: Oh, no!

MS: And I—I had to pay for the eggs, and I had to got get them. But hey was about sixteen cents a dozen—seventeen cents, so it wasn't that much. But I was only making a dollar a day so, you know. But people would give me a nickel or dime tip. Because then it was a very different business because this was in the thirties, you know what I mean? Things was real cheap.

AE: Um, can you speak to anything about the history of New Orleans where there were a lot of bars that were for men only? Men's clubs and things like that?

MS: Well, there was, uh, [short pause] there was a couple places that, uh, I can—I can't recall off-hand now because I'd have to go back and think. But there was some club where, you know, only mens went into, you know. No—no ladies at all. They had some kind of thing here, I don't know hat it was, [short pause] at the hotel. I can't remember what that was. You'd have to check with the food and beverage [sound of door closing] manager. But there was some places that, uh, you couldn't—womens couldn't go into them.

AE: Um-hmm.

MS: There's a time when grocery stores, you—you know, like you couldn't go into some grocery stores. I mean, like blacks couldn't go into some bars. You couldn't go into the bars many years ago. Some of them had a little hole cut

into the side of the building, and you'd knock on that [knocks on table] and a door [would] open up—they'd open a little thing, and then you'd order what you want from that little window. If it was raining or something like that, you know, they'd let you come stand at the door. Just enough room, they'd let you stand in the door there. That—that happened in this bar at [that] time. But going back to that, if I go back to that, I could talk [for] two or three weeks [about] things of that nature, you know what I mean. But it's bygone, and I don't want to deal with it. Don't want to talk too much about it. [Short pause] You have any other questions?

AE: No. We've covered an awful lot, and I sure appreciate you giving me your time on your day off. Unless there's something that you want to add or a final thought.

[COUNTER: 75:00]

MS: Well, uh, here at the hotel that, uh, like I said, I—I have customers that, uh, I'm dedicated to them, they're dedicated to me. And I know them, and we talk and things. Some of them bring me fish, crabs, shrimp—all that. Not crab but they bring me fish of all nature. Uh, red fish, catfish, tenderloin—all clean and all I have to do is just throw them out—because they freeze them because they're traveling with them, you know what I mean. And I put them in the freezer here, and I get home—sometimes I have enough to last me two or three weeks.

AE: Wow. My goodness.

MS: Oh, yeah. Croakers. The shrimps are peeled. Don't have to worry about them. They—they do all that for me and bring them to me. [Short laugh] I love that. And they—Christmas time? I get Christmas cards from them and all like that. Birthday cards from them. I got a birthday coming up [on] May the fourth. I'll be eighty-four.

AE: That's—

MS: I'll make thirty-four years here on the twenty-fifth of this month. Been thirty-four years that I've worked at the Royal Orleans.

AE: That's quite a milestone.

MS: Um-hmm.

AE: I know they're glad to have you.

MS: Yeah. [Tapping feet]

AE: And all your loyal customers are glad that you're still here.

MS: Hmm? Oh, yeah.

AE: Yeah?

MS: Yeah, I'm ded—I'm very dedicated to the employees because they help me out considerable.

AE: Um-hmm.

MS: You know, because some things I have to go to the back to get, you know, to make some sort of thing, and they generally help me out. Go and get it for me and, you know. So—I'm pretty well satisfied with the set-up.

AE: Wonderful.

MS: So when I leave [short pause] I'm going to write a note and frame it. And have them to stick it somewhere and, you know, let them know how much I appreciated whatever they did and whatnot, you know, so-and-so. Things like that.

AE: well I appreciate this interview. It's been lovely visiting with you. Thank you so much—

MS: Okay.

AE: —Professor. [Short laugh]

MS: Who—who—who had told you to come see me?

AE: Um, Lolos Eric Elie at *The Times-Picayune* suggested that I come to the Rib Room.

MS: Well, uh, what you call it wanted to—the guy who was writing the, uh, [short pause] "Spice of Life." They had all the fashion like—you know, what you're doing here? The guy was writing in the paper. Called it "Spice of Life."

AE: Oh, okay.

MS: And he had been trying to interview me. Of course, I have, you know, much more than what you and I have just discussed.

AE: oh, sure.

MS: but, uh, I try not—I—I kept putting him off because I had things to do, and I was trying to make up my mind what I wanted to tell him about, you know. Because this here was going to be a—two, three pages, you know. Because he do a whole big writing, you know. And the thing that I had

would—would go a long way from what—how they would explain it too. You know how they can stretch—

AE: Right.

MS: —it out, you know, and things like that. So I kept putting it off. So I don't see it no more in the paper. I don't know if he retired or what. But I—I'm not familiar with the gentleman you just mentioned.

AE: yeah, he's—he's been writing for the Times-Picayune for a while now, and he's, um, on the board of the Southern Foodways Alliance.

MS: Now he's—that's might be him. That might his right name, but I thought he called it "Spice of Life."

AE: Yeah, I'm not sure.

MS: Maybe he's—mentioned—yeah maybe he did.

AE: Well anyway, you are a wealth of information and history of New Orleans and bartending and certainly many other things.

MS: Yeah, I remember many years ago, when I was a kid in nineteen twenty-seven when the flood—you ever heard of the flood?

AE: Oh, sure.

MS: When the Mississippi and all that?

AE: Yeah, of course.

MS: Yeah, I was a little kid when the water came over the city.

AE: Wow.

MS: yeah, nineteen twenty-seven. Somewhere in September, I think it was. Called it "September Storm." It rained and rained, the levee broke. I got a book on that.

[Short pause]

AE: Um-hmm. Yeah, there are a lot of books on the flood.

MS: yeah.

AE: Yep, that was—

MS: I just got—this book I got, this guy did a good job.

AE: yeah?

MS: Um-hmm.

[Short pause]

AE: I think my tape's about to end here, so—

MS: Hmm?

AE: My tape's about to end here—

MS: Oh, okay.

AE: —so I'm just going to turn it off. And—

MS: All right.

AE: —thank you again.

[COUNTER: 79:31]

[END]