

**WILLORA EPHRAM, “MISS PEACHES”
Peaches Restaurant – Jackson, Mississippi**

Date: September 11, 2013

Location: Willora Ephram’s Residence – Jackson, MS

Interviewer: Kimber Thomas

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 41 minutes

Project: Jackson’s Iconic Restaurants

[Begin Peaches Interview]

00:00:03

Kimber Thomas: This is Kimber Thomas for the Southern Foodways Alliance. Today is Wednesday, September 11, 2013 and I'm here at the home of Ms. Peaches. Ms. Peaches I'm going to start by asking you to introduce yourself and just tell me your name and your occupation.

00:00:21

Peaches: Hello?

00:00:26

KT: Just talk right to—

00:00:29

Peaches: Oh—oh okay.

00:00:34

KT: Okay; just tell me your name and your occupation.

00:00:37

Peaches: *[Laughs]* My name is Willora Ephram. My pet name is Peaches. So I've been carrying the Peaches name for—since the '40s when I came to Jackson. And ever since then I've been—

they've been giving me a—they say I was nice and they gave me a pet name of Peaches. So I've been carrying that name ever since.

00:01:17

KT: And for the record can you just tell me your birth date?

00:01:21

Peaches: January 26, 1924.

00:01:30

KT: Okay; we're going to start out by just talking a little bit about your childhood. So can you tell me where you're from and what it was like growing up there?

00:01:41

Peaches: My home is Utica, Mississippi and—excuse me how I talk because I just got out of the hospital with open heart surgery. And sometimes—sometimes I can't hardly talk or can't hardly hear but I still have that determined to get—do what I have done all the time and that's run the restaurant.

00:02:39

My name is—is Willora Ephram and I—I was raised in Utica, Mississippi. And so that's where I've been since then and when I—I was at Peaches that's where I was raised and—and the name of Peaches—I can't hardly talk now; y'all excuse me 'cause ever since the—you mean that open heart surgery I have had an open heart and I can't hardly talk. But anyway I have a determined to do—which Mitchell called me and asked me to talk to the—you and I still

determined to do it but I can't—sometimes I can't hardly talk. But anyway I still have determined to do what and tell you how I was. And what you want; what you want me—?

00:04:31

KT: Talk about Utica and growing up in Utica.

00:04:34

Peaches: Oh I was—grow(ed) in—in a farm—on a farm in Utica, Mississippi. And since then I—I—I was raised down there and then I came to Jackson in—in the '40s and that's where I've been ever since. And I opened the restaurant in 1961 at—at Peaches. And that's where I've been ever since then.

00:05:21

KT: What do you remember about growing up on the farm in Utica?

00:05:32

Peaches: Uh, we—we farmed—raised cotton and everything out on the farm in Utica. And we—we—

00:06:03

KT: Do you remember your parents? Could you tell me what your parents were like?

00:06:06

Peaches: Oh my parents was Nellie Craft and Johnny Craft; those are my parents. And they was sweet people.

00:06:28

KT: Do you remember the food that you ate growing up? Who did the cooking?

00:06:31

Peaches: I did the cooking when I was growing up in the house 'cause I didn't—I didn't like to farm too much and my father would always send me to the house. You stay here today and cook so you'd have our dinner ready when we come out of the field. And so that's what I did. I never—I didn't do no—whole lot of farming. Uh—hm; I didn't do a whole lot of farming.

00:07:05

KT: So who taught you how to cook, like was it a parent or—?

00:07:08

Peaches: My mother, my grandmother; the taught me how to cook.

00:07:14

KT: And you would cook the food that y'all grew?

00:07:17

Peaches: Uh—huh; when I come out the field when they get home from the field I'd always have—I would always have our lunch, dinner ready and they wouldn't have nothing to do but eat and get ready to go back to the field.

00:07:43

KT: Do you remember—do you remember what you would cook for lunch and dinner?

00:07:47

Peaches: My main thing was cooking—was fried okra and all that kind of stuff.

00:08:10

KT: Do you remember any other foods besides the fried okra?

00:08:14

Peaches: Peas, corn, which was my favorite—favorite meal was fried corn. So that was my—

00:08:39

KT: The fried corn was your favorite?

00:08:40

Peaches: Oh yeah; my favorite—my favorite was fried corn.

00:08:47

KT: So tell me about—you mentioned that you came to Jackson in the '40s; tell me about how you ended up in Jackson and eventually opening the restaurant.

00:09:02

Peaches: I came to Jackson with a friend of mine's and—and in '48 and I got a job—a restaurant and I worked at the restaurant 'til—in '61. And then since I said well, I can run a restaurant for somebody else or I can run it just for myself, so that's where I started, running a restaurant for myself in '61.

00:09:59

KT: So how did you end up on Farish Street?

00:10:01

Peaches: I got a job at a restaurant and when I got that job at that restaurant I—they told me I was such a good worker and wanted to know did I want to run a restaurant for myself. So I said well I don't know that I can but I will. I'll give it a try. So that's what I done.

00:10:50

KT: And what is your earliest memory of your restaurant on Farish Street?

00:10:59

Peaches: When I opened a restaurant on Farish Street I—I didn't—y'all excuse me 'cause since—since I've been operated on I couldn't—I can't hardly think. I can't hardly talk. But if it hadn't been Mitchell, I'd have told him no. **[Laughs]** And so it might be something on here that he don't really understand, but anyway I want him to feel free to come back or call me and let

me straighten it out because I—I can't hardly talk since they cut me—open heart. It's been about three weeks ago.

00:12:03

KT: Uh—hm.

00:12:04

Peaches: Uh—hm. I can't hardly talk. I can't hardly speak. But I—huh?

00:12:14

KT: Just take your time.

00:12:15

Peaches: But I hadn't seen Mitchell and they told me Mitchell wanted to come by here. And I said oh yes 'cause I hadn't seen Mitchell since I been sick. And I had told all of them before—where Mitchell is? Everybody been to see me but Mitchell; uh—huh. Okay; what else you want?

00:12:41

KT: Okay; so we were talking about your restaurant on Farish Street and what your earliest memory of the restaurant is.

00:12:48

Peaches: My early memory was when I opened this restaurant—opened, I had a small amount of black—eyed peas and stuff like that and—and when I started, but I was little—by—little each day I would do more and ‘til it grew bigger and bigger every day; uh—hm.

00:13:34

KT: So you talked about the ‘40s; do you remember when restaurants were segregated in the ‘40s or earlier?

00:13:40

Peaches: Yes; I was down there when they—

00:14:07

KT: The segregated restaurants?

00:14:09

Peaches: Huh?

00:14:09

KT: Do you remember—you were saying you were down there when the restaurants were segregated?

00:14:12

Peaches: Oh yeah; when they—when they—the—the segregated—when the Civil Rights done all that running and throwing bricks and all that stuff, but I was right down there. And a lot of

times they would be coming; here they come, here they come. And I'd open the door and let them in. And they stayed there until it quieted down and then they would go back out. Anyway it—it was good. I enjoyed it when it was going on and I never was afraid when it was going on. But it was—it was good.

00:15:12

KT: Is there a particular day or any event that stands out in your memory during that time, during the Civil Rights Movement or—?

00:15:23

Peaches: Yes; I—I remember when they would have the Civil Rights would be going on and so we would—I can't hardly think about what—. I want you to come by here or call me one day so I can—when I can think better than I'm doing now 'cause I can't hardly think. But anyway Mitchell's grandmother was working with me. She was in high school and she would come by to see—see me when a lot of that stuff was going on.

00:16:50

KT: And we're still talking about the desegregation. Was there—is there anything that sticks out in your memory about it—any event that happened or that you just remember vividly up during that time?

00:17:05

Peaches: No; I don't—nothing really that happened real bad. It was because the people already—

00:17:28

KT: You had a lot of people come down to your restaurant didn't you, like who are some of those pictures of? They came during the Civil Rights?

00:17:35

Peaches: Uh—huh.

00:17:37

KT: Martin Luther King?

00:17:40

Peaches: Oh Martin Luther King, if—I was—I have a wall full at the restaurant, pictures of Martin Luther King and all them different—uh—huh. Yeah; uh—huh yeah maybe Elvis, all of them came down and you could—by me sitting here at the house, but now if I was at the restaurant I could look on the wall and tell you a lot of things that happened, who came in, at what time they did come in. But sometime you come down there and—and now since I can't hardly think about what really happened.

00:18:42

KT: Do you remember what the atmosphere was like inside your restaurant during the Civil Rights Movement?

00:18:52

Peaches: It was good; nobody never—never like they wanted to fight or nothing like that because I always had a very good crowd—crowd, place, and if something was going on, if it wasn't something that wasn't with the—I would say we're not going to have that in here. You're going to have to take it outside. And so that's what they would do. She said we can't talk loud or whatever in her place we're going to have to obey her. And so I always kept a—a quiet place to eat and all that.

00:20:02

KT: Do you remember Farish Street?

00:20:05

Peaches: Who?

00:20:05

KT: Farish Street.

00:20:08

Peaches: Do I remember it?

00:20:08

KT: Uh—hm; do you have any memories of Farish Street?

00:20:12

Peaches: Farish Street was a—was a good place and—and I would have—I had good food and they would come in for—for the breakfast, dinner, and supper is what they would say. And I would—of course Mitchell during that time was a little boy and then he—he **[Laughs]**—very sweet little boy. And his mother would bring him down sometimes and we would have—and he would get back there. A lot of the little boys when they'd come down they wanted me to—to clean the tables or wash some dishes and for me to give them some money, which I would.

[Laughs]

00:21:49

KT: Do you remember what other restaurants were on Farish Street during the like '40s, '50s, '60s?

00:21:56

Peaches: There was one restaurant on Farish Street called the Blackstone. One was the Booker T. Grill.

00:22:15

KT: Was Big John's there then?

00:22:16

Peaches: Big Apple it was still; yeah it's still there.

00:22:40

KT: So the food in your restaurant was the same food that you grew up cooking—that you learned how to cook on the farm?

00:22:47

Peaches: Uh—hm.

00:22:49

KT: The same?

00:22:49

Peaches: The same.

00:22:49

KT: Tell me some more about the food you cooked at the restaurant.

00:22:54

Peaches: The same food I cook at the restaurant when I opened it is the same food which I always added a little bit more to it, made—made more, but it was the same food. And people would ask me how did I learn to cook or where did I learn to cook at, which my mother—I couldn't see on the table when I was at home, but she had a box for me to stand on where I could look on the table and see what she was doing and that's what I grew up doing the same thing.

00:23:46

KT: Favorite dessert was?

00:23:49

Peaches: Oh your—peaches, peach cobbler; uh—hm that's what we done—peach cobbler.

00:23:58

KT: That would be everybody's favorite dessert?

00:24:02

Peaches: Uh—huh.

00:24:03

KT: That's why they call you Peaches.

00:24:08

Peaches: Yeah.

00:24:11

KT: So when you said it was the same food but you always added a little bit more to it, tell me what you mean by that.

00:24:17

Peaches: Well I would cook more—what I meant by adding a little bit more to it was because I—

00:24:53

KT: Tell about them—

00:24:56

Peaches: Chitterlings, chitterlings, hog maw added to it and most people would say they didn't like hog maw and you cook them at—with the chitterlings. You couldn't tell the difference.

00:25:18

KT: Fried chicken and pork chops—

00:25:22

Peaches: See; he could have [*Laughs*]—'cause he can—he can think and I can't even think, yeah some smothered pork chops. We would have that and—

00:25:39

KT: You have some good breakfast too.

00:25:41

Peaches: Oh we cook breakfast. We cook—and would have pancakes and—

00:25:49

KT: Red—

00:25:53

Peaches: We still do, still have that red rose sausage, ham, grits. We'd have grits. [*Laughs*] I had two things going and one, so they decided to wait you get through.

00:26:36

KT: It won't be too much longer.

00:26:39

Peaches: Okay.

00:26:40

KT: Do you remember when the restaurants were desegregated—when they became desegregated?

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Peaches: Not the '50s; in the '60s is when I remember the day that they said tonight you can go anywhere you want to—to eat because the white people and—and the black ones was going to eat together that night. And I remember that very well. And that sign saying when they had that—

00:27:40

KT: At the hotel?

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Peaches: Oh yeah; it was a hotel, uh—hm.

00:27:49

KT: So you said—you said the white and black people were supposed to eat together and did it ever happen?

00:27:55

Peaches: Yeah; that particular night they started to—everybody ate and—

00:28:09

KT: Were they in Peaches or do you mean just in general?

00:28:12

Peaches: Oh yeah; the whole town. If wherever you decided to go during that night and—and you could do that.

00:28:21

KT: And things were peaceful?

00:28:23

Peaches: Uh—hm; they was very good people and everybody was nice and polite.

00:28:31

KT: Did Peaches change any when the restaurants became desegregated?

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Peaches: No; it just got more—everybody was—was nice and—

00:29:01

KT: Why do you think Peaches has been around so long and is such a legend in Jackson?

00:29:10

Peaches: Well people been—Peaches has been around so long is because Peaches was nice to everybody and she's really liked people. And everybody would talk about Peaches 'cause I had some peoples from Germany come and visit Peaches and they said that people had heard about Peaches over in Germany and they wouldn't come and see it. So that's why one person tells another one and this one tells the other one about Peaches. And so that's why it's really so big, and I tried to—or tell my help to be nice to people and they would come back. So that's why it grew bigger and bigger all the time.

00:30:23

KT: You mentioned the people coming from Germany to visit Peaches. Is there any other event that stands out in your memory about the restaurant?

00:30:34

Peaches: Yeah; well I'm making a very, very poor speech because I can't—I can't think and I can't—

00:30:55

KT: You're doing good.

00:30:58

Peaches: If y'all had come by here I could have talked better at the restaurant than I can here because I have so much displays on the walls and it brings my memories back. But—uh—huh—

00:31:28

KT: What do you think is most important for us to remember about Peaches, the restaurant?

00:31:33

Peaches: *[Laughs]* Most important thing about Peaches, everybody calls me—I got several different names they call me, Mama T, Peaches; that's why Mitchell calls me, Mama T. And most other—all of my nieces and nephews they mostly call me Mama T. Those two ladies that just come by here, they call me Mama T. But most of the other peoples call me Peaches. And so, that's how I got the name Peaches. When I was working at the restaurant this old man for—told me one day that I was so sweet he was going to call me Peaches. So that's why—and I was going to be his Peaches. So that's why I got the name of Peaches.

00:32:40

KT: Yeah; what do you want people to remember about the restaurant?

00:32:49

Peaches: Good food and I was a—I was a good cook. So therefore, you remember me as Mama T, a good cook. And so that's what I want—I want on my grave when I go to—when I die that I was a good cook.

00:33:32

KT: I have just a few more questions and then we're going to wrap up. But tell me what makes a good cook. According to Peaches what is a good cook?

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Peaches: *[Laughs]* What you put in it and what you—what you—what you, a good cook makes—you put—it's what you put in your food, how you season your food, clean, so—.

00:34:31

KT: What is your favorite meal to prepare? Like what do you enjoy cooking more than anything else?

00:34:38

Peaches: Black—eyed peas, ham hocks, candied yams; that's my favorite dinner. So whenever—if I didn't have nothing else to cook but that—I did that and everybody—they would call me on the phone. You got any black—eyed peas today? You got any—any ham hocks? Yeah; so that was my favorite lunch. What did you say?

00:35:28

KT: Just speaking to your son. And what is your least favorite thing to cook?

00:35:33

Peaches: Hmm?

00:35:34

KT: What is your least favorite thing to cook? What is it that you don't like to cook?

00:35:39

Peaches: I don't know nothing I don't like to cook. I like to cook everything as long as I—I can get in the kitchen. But since when—after I got sick I—I can't do it like I used to. My son, he—he—he took over and he's done a good job cooking and doing everything, so—

00:36:13

KT: Okay; and what do you think is the most important thing for us to remember about black—owned restaurants in Jackson?

00:36:23

Peaches: Well black—owned restaurants is favorite—my favorite thing. All of my nieces and nephews, they are very good by cooking or saying what they want—want to cook. My son, he—he learned—he learned to cook, so—.

00:37:06

KT: And so what do you want to—what should we remember about black—owned restaurants in Jackson?

00:37:13

Peaches: Black—owned restaurants is—is something really good to—to know and to—and good to—to do 'cause a lot of times people say black—owned restaurants, they—they'd rather go to white people's places. But I've known since I am in business that—that a lot of the white

people would come there you know. And then—then they would go other places and do the—some of the same cooking(s) that we done at Peaches.

00:38:12

KT: I have one more question to ask you about the restaurant. Was there any tradition that you associated with Peaches like every Saturday you would do this or ever Friday you would do this? Is there anything?

00:38:25

Peaches: We cooked—cooked fish on Friday and on Saturday—and we cooked chitterlings and other than that we would—you know I would have to cook certain things. We would cook.

00:39:00

KT: Was it a reason why you cooked certain foods on certain days or that was just the tradition?

00:39:04

Peaches: Tradition; uh—huh.

00:39:07

KT: And is there anything else you want to add about yourself, the restaurant, anything else?

00:39:35

Peaches: What did you say? Oh okay; no. Everybody knows Mama T or Peaches or whatever. They more likely would add to—to the menu 'cause they would say we're going to Mama T's.

So if they say they was going to Mama T's then everybody wanted to go to Mama T's place;
so—uh—huh.

00:40:12

KT: Okay; we're finished.

00:40:15

Peaches: Yes.

00:40:15

KT: Thank you.

00:40:16

[End Peaches Interview]