
FULL TRANSCRIPT:

SUBJECT: Paul Gustings, bartender @
The Napoleon House & Tujague's
500 Chartres Street 823 Decatur Street
New Orleans, LA 70130 New Orleans, LA 70116

DATE: March 29, 2005 @ 11:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Napoleon House back dining room

INTERVIEWER: Amy Evans

LENGTH: Approx. 35 minutes

NOTE: Various sounds occur throughout this interview. Rather than mention them individually and interrupt the flow of the conversation, they are noted here: waiters and kitchen staff can be heard in the background closing up for the night; various voices can be heard in conversation at different times; Mr. Gustings was closing out his register and counting money during the course of the interview, so there are sounds of change being counted and papers being shuffled around throughout the audio. In addition, since this interview was conducted at such a late hour, the interviewer took a friend along, who can be heard drinking from a glass and chewing on pieces of ice from time to time. When the occurring sounds are an obvious interruption to the interview, they are noted in the transcript.

* * *

[The recording opens with a waiter asking Paul a question about ending his shift for the night]

EMPLOYEE: I'm going to clock out [unintelligible phrase] if that's okay. Is that it, Paul?

Paul Gustings: Yeah. [Under his breath to interviewer] He's such an idiot.

Amy Evans: This is Tuesday, March twenty-ninth, two thousand and five. This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance, and I'm with Paul Gustings at the Napoleon House. And it's approximately eleven o'clock in the p.m., I believe. And, uh, Paul is closing up shop. And where here to talk to him about his time tending bar in the city of New Orleans at the Napoleon House and at Tujague's, correct?

PG: Tujague's, yes.

AE: All right. [Sound of microphone being turned to face subject] So are you a native of New Orleans?

PG: No, I'm not. [Sound of Paul counting paper money]

AE: Where are you from originally?

PG: I'm from the Netherlands. [BIRTHDATE: August 6, 1956]

AE: Oh, okay. [Sound of bill hinges in cash register drawer being lifted up]
When did you come to New Orleans?

[Short pause. Sound of Paul pulling change from the cash register drawer]

PG: Two weeks after Mardi Gras. I don't remember which year.

AE: [Laughs]

FRIEND: [Laughs]

PG: Yeah, I think it was nineteen eighty-one or nineteen eighty-two, I'm not sure.

AE: Okay.

PG: It might be nineteen eighty, I don't remember.

AE: So what brought you here?

PG: Uh, I came to see some friends of mine, and I was going to stay here about two, three weeks and then go somewhere else.

AE: Ha! [Laughs]

PG: Yeah, really. A normal story.

AE: So you—

PG: There's a few people like that.

AE: Oh, I'm sure. So was this job one of the first jobs that you got when you decided to stay or did you work somewhere else?

PG: Um, no. I had, uh, how many jobs? I had like four of five jobs before that.

AE: Yeah? Here, there and everywhere?

PG: Here and there, yeah. My first bartending job was really interesting, actually.

AE: Where was that?

PG: It was at Funky Butts, which—

AE: Oh, okay.

PG: Which was *not* the Funky Butts it is know. At the time, it was the, uh, Clubhouse of the Galloping Gooses, which was the local chapter of the Hell's Angels.

AE: Okay!

PG: And it's quite different the way it is now because now it's—

AE: Yeah, I would say.

PG: —it's just a music club now. But that was one of my first jobs, and I got this job [at the Napoleon House] in, uh, nineteen eighty-six.

AE: Yeah?

PG: So that's how long I've worked here, since nineteen eight-six.
[Continuous sound of Paul putting money and papers in an envelope]

AE: Did you bartend in the Netherlands before you came over?

PG: I'm sorry?

AE: Did you bartend in the Netherlands before—

PG: No. I went to school.

AE: Yeah?

PG: Of course I did.

AE: What did you go to school for?

PG: Stuff.

AE: [Laughs] So you learned on the job? On the job training at the Funky Butt or—which was the Hell's Angels bar?

PG: Yeah. I don't know if that was my first job or my second job. I don't remember. I think it was my second job. My first—well, another place I worked was the Dream Palace.

AE: Okay.

PG: Which, uh, was a—like a downtown Tipitina's?

AE: Yeah.

PG: Where—you know, the Radiators played there, the Neville Bothers, uh, uh, Little Queenie, all those people they lived—they played there before they got *really* well known.

AE: Yeah.

PG: And, yeah, you learn on the job. [Sound of money-filled envelope hitting the table] That's—

[Short pause]

AE: So what was it like?

PG: What was *what* like?

AE: Being thrown to the lions and learning on the job?

PG: Oh. I'm not being thrown to the lions; I am the lion.

AE: Oh, okay.

PG: [Laughs] You know? Uh, I'm not easily intimidated.

AE: Yeah?

PG: So, you, know, people ask you for something [and] you don't know how to make it, just tell them. And most people don't know what the hell they're drinking anyways.

AE: [Laughs] Right.

PG: You fake it. You lie. [Imitating a customer ordering a drink. Assumes nerdy accent] "I'll have a purple whoobbely-boobely upside down." "Sure! No problem. Here you go." [Customer then says,] "That's not how it tastes like at home." I say, "Well, you're not at home. That's how we make 'em here."

AE: [Laughing]

PG: People don't know. They have no clue, you know." [Sound of bill clips in the cash register drawer being clicked back down] And it's, uh, and it's kind of interesting when there are people—there's a—there's a whole group of people that write books on the bar business, drinks, [sound of employee bowing their nose] uh, which ingredient to use for whatever, which utensil to use for whatever. And they just opened up the Southern Comfort Cocktail Museum [Museum of the American Cocktail] right next door, and

it's—it's—it's kind of refreshing to get those people to come in because they kind of picky about what they drink. They're not jerks. Actually they're all *really* nice people, which really surprised me.

AE: Yeah?

PG: [With even more emphasis] *Really* surprised me. But they—they know exactly what goes in a drink. They know exactly how to drink it, how to make it and stuff like that. And it's kind of a—it's kind of nice to have somebody that really appreciates when you make them a drink the right way.

AE: Yeah?

PG: And unfortunately, they don't come in that often, you know?

AE: Yeah. [Short laugh] So you—

PG: Well, you know, it's like Cipri—but things have changed too. Cipriani's in New York gets, uh—

EMPLOYEE: [Heard in background speaking with accent] I haven't finished so—so I'm assuming it's okay]

PG: —best bar in the United States basically ever year. And the reason why? Because if you ask for a Screwdriver, they pour vodka, then they cut an orange in half, and they squeeze the orange for you, and you get orange juice. You need six people behind the bar if you do that. But that's, you know, people now [short pause] they don't—you don't have any orange juice? Give 'em grapefruit. They don't know.

[Sound of coins being dropped in the cash register drawer]

AE: [Short laugh] So what makes a good bartender in the [French] Quarter? Just getting by or—

PG: I don't really know. Um, I don't really know. I never thought of that.

[COUNTER: 05:00]

AE: Patience, I would imagine—

PG: Oh, no. Oh, no.

AE: [Soft laugh while talking]—has something to do with it. [Laughing]

PG: Oh, no. No, no. No patience. No. Because, uh, well it depends. Some people do. You know, the thing—it really depends on how people approach you, you know, [with] how patient you are. Or how nice you are to them, or

how not-nice you are to them. What makes a good bartender in the French Quarter? I couldn't tell you. I have no idea. Because the only place I was bartending was in the French Quarter, so I don't know. I don't—uh—

AE: Well people obviously revere you as a bartender, and you have regular customers that come to see you. What do you think that is [short pause] that brings them back?

PG: Because I'm such a wonderful person. Obv—well, of course that's what that is!

AE: [Laughing]

PG: What do you think?! God!

AE: Well, you know, you could pour with a heavy hand, you could—

PG: No, that has nothing to do with it.

AE: —toss bottles in the air.

PG: No, I don't do that either. I toss people out the door.

AE: [Laughs]

PG: Uh, well first of all, you have to have a sense of humor. If you don't have a sense of humor, you might as well forget it. Uh, I don't kiss anybody's ass. Nobody.

AE: Yeah, and locals appreciate that.

PG: Nobody. No, actually they *don't* appreciate that. The ones that come in here, they—their fine with that. But there are some places where—you know, people walk in the door, and they'll say, "I'll have two gin and tonics, and I'm a local." [Short pause] "Well that's interesting. What's that supposed to mean?"

AE: Right.

PG: "Does that mean that you think that I rip everybody off that's not from here. Does it mean—what?! You want special treatment? Do you want more gin? Do you want extra tonic? What are you—what does that mean?"

AE: [Laughs]

[Sound of change being thrown into the cash register drawer.]

PG: "And on top of that—you know what that means? If you say you're a local? That I don't recognize you. Because otherwise you wouldn't have to tell me that. So what does that mean? You don't ever come in here." That's, you know—that's—people do that all the time. I've had people tell me that the owner sent them over to have a drink on him for free. Well, the owner is standing right next to me. They don't know him. They've just heard of him. They know his name.

AE: Yeah.

PG: So they come in and they try. That's another one. It's like, "I know so-and-so." "Well, that's funny, so do I!"

AE: [Laughs]

PG: "I see him every day," you know!

AE: So what keeps you doing it?

PG: I'm used to it by now.

AE: Yeah?

PG: You know, and it is—it's like you said earlier on. It's like what's the good thing. What's the bad thing? I don't know. You know, some times it's not—it's all bad. That's just the way it is. But sometimes it's all good. Sometimes things go well [and] you have really nice people. Uh, you know, you have a good time doing it. Sometimes you walk in and it's just—it's just not like that, you know?

AE: What is a nice customer for you? Is it someone who's chatty and friendly or—

PG: No, that depends. No, that really depends on—on how they are. Well, first of all, if you don't understand my kind of humor, then [laughs]—

AE: [Laughs]

PG: --you're at a loss anyway. [Short pause] You know, I'd really like to know how many people walk down the street and go, "Honey, was that guy nice to us, or was he an asshole?" [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

PG: 'Cause I tell people things, and they just don't get 'em.

AE: Yeah.

PG: And you know, if you have to explain it, forget about it. And you know, when you have group of five or six people, two of them think you're really, really funny. But one guy thinks that you're a jerk, and two of them don't get it, so you're—it's—you know, it really depends. And if you have a whole group of people that, you know, that you can talk to then—then that's good.

AE: Yeah. And I saw today when I was at the bar, when Greg [Cowman, See Greg Cowman interview transcript] was tending [bar], uh, one of the Southern Comfort Cocktail Tours came through.

PG: Yeah, with Joe. Joe's a good guy. He was the guy with the hat on. Yeah, he's good. Yeah, they come in here every day.

AE: Yeah? It's amazing they have that—that—that tour going on and people pounding the pavement to come make all the stops and have a Pimm's Cup in a go-cup. [Laughs]

PG: Oh, yeah. And then they go to all the other bars, where they might or might not have a drink, I don't know. And they end up at Tujague's, where they get the Southern Comfort Plantation Cocktail which [short pause] well—

AE: What is that, exactly?

PG: Is, uh, Southern Comfort, pineapple juice, grenadine and soda water. It's all right. It's—it's really sweet. You know, somebody made it by mistake once with, uh, [laughs]—this is really funny. Instead of gren—instead of whatever, they made it with, uh, Bloody Mary mix.

AE: Ooh! [Makes sour face]

PG: And [laughs] nobody could tell! They [the customers] kind of go like, "Oh, this is—this is different." [Laughing] You know! I mean not just Blood Mary mix, but they had—it was—we pre-mix it, and somebody added Bloody Mary mix. They were thinking it was, I don't know—

AE: Grenadine?

PG: Grenadine or something. I don't know. And nobody said anything. It was like, "Oh, well, you know. This is all right." [Laughs] It was kind of funny.

AE: So when did you start working over there [at Tujague's]?

PG: Uh, s—s—seven and a half—almost seven and a half years ago.

AE: Yeah? How is that different from the Napoleon House?

PG: Um [five second pause] it's very different. They have—they have a lot more people that come in every single day. You know, we have a lot of locals

that come in here, but they don't come in every day. They come in whenever they're in town. There are people there [at Tujague's] that live right down the street, and the first thing they do in the morning when they wake up? Go to Tujague's. It's getting [to be] less, but it's still, you know—It's a much bigger bar. And it's a completely different set up. But the bar is in the front, with the dining room in the back. Well here [at the Napoleon House], the dining room is everywhere—in the front, in the bar, everywhere.

[COUNTER: 10:24]

AE: So what do people—

PG: It's not really that much different.

AE: —order when they go to Tujague's?

PG: What's that?

AE: What do the regulars order when they go to Tujague's?

PG: Well, same as here: beer and vodka.

[Short pause]

AE: Vodka's the big thing?

PG: Oh, *yeah*. Vodka's a *really* big thing.

AE: Huh.

PG: *Real* big thing. Yeah, the drinks we make here [short pause] we make more complicated—if that's what you want to call it—complicated drinks here than we do at Tujague's. Tujague's is more [short pause]—for dinner, it's more wine, you know. It's never more than a Sazerac. You know the waiters panic if they get a drink that they have no clue what it is. They always have to come and ask me. But, uh, drinks here are much more [short pause] uh, we have more *drinks* here.

AE: Yeah.

PG: I mean, I don't consider a vodka and tonic really a drink. That is—it's just a mixer. But, uh—

AE: Well what about those drinks and the history of the cocktail in New Orleans? Do you have—

PG: What about it?

AE: I don't know. Any ideas about that?

PG: You want to know how it works? How they started?

AE: Well, you know, I mean there is some, you know, scholarship about how the word "cocktail" came about and [how] the Sazerac came about and all that, but I mean, [all the different cocktails being served] in different bars around the city and how you learn to make them and how people drink them and—

PG: How I learned how to make them? I still don't know that. I just pick it up somewhere along the line. Yeah. Uh, there's a lot of—there's a lot of drinks that I make that nobody [else] makes anymore.

AE: Like what?

PG: Absinthe Suisse. [short pause] Ramos Gin Fizz made the right way.

AE: What's the right way?

PG: With the real—it's a very complicated drink. It's got like f—ten ingredients. And what people do—and that's—that's my point. When Cipriani's gets "Best Bar in [the] United States" because they squeeze the orange for you right there—a lot of people take shortcuts. Like a Ramos Gin Fizz, you really need powdered sugar. But [short pause] you know, people go, "I don't need powdered sugar; I'll just use sugar-water." You can't do that. That's a very different drink.

AE: So where did you learn to make the "right" Ramos Gin Fizz?

PG: I don't know—

AE: Somewhere along the [laughs]

PG: I just picked it up somewhere along the line.

AE: Huh.

PG: I found a, uh, I found a—uh, a nineteen thirty-four [short pause]—nineteen thirty-three? I don't remember—[It was] a how-to book on New Orleans drinks—in a garbage can. Which I walked into because I was reading a newspaper. And, you know, I was picking it up, and I said, "Oh, look at this." And it said—that was a really interesting book. I think it was thirty-three. It might have been some different year. I don't remember. And that was—and there's a whole bunch of drinks in there that were made the old way. And that's one of the things I've picked up. Like a Whiskey Sour. All Whiskey Sours have egg whites in them. Nobody does that anymore. It's too

much trouble. And people go, "Ooh, lech." I can tell by your face—people go, "Ooh! Eh!" You know?

AE: [Laughs]

PG: But—but I mean, that's what that is. It's—you know, the sour mix has egg white in it. That's why it foams up.

AE: So if somebody comes to the bar and asks for a—a Whiskey Sour, will you make that?

PG: With egg whites?

AE: Yeah.

PG: NO. Because they don't know what they're drinking anyway.

AE: [Short laugh] Right.

PG: And they probably don't want it.

AE: Right.

PG: If they see me put an egg white in it, they have [short pause]—It's like, "I'm not drinking that. That's nasty. That's not how my mother makes it," or whatever.

AE: Right.

PG: So I don't do that.

AE: So if you have—

PG: Unless they ask for it.

AE: Do you have a discerning customer that asks for that?

PG: Nay. Mmm, there's a few of them

AE: Yeah?

PG: I had some English people at the bar that, uh, were just fascinated with how they make drinks in the United States. And they were in here [pauses to think] Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and today. And they did not have the same drink once.

AE: Wow.

PG: And they said, "Make us some drinks." And I said, "Well, what do you—" He goes, "We don't care. We just want to have different drinks to see what they're like." So I made them a bunch of different drinks.

AE: Like?

PG: What?

AE: All that you've mentioned so far?

PG: Oh, I—

AE: Did you make them a Ramos Gin Fizz?

PG: No, we don't make Ramos Gin Fizz here.

AE: Oh, okay.

PG: Uh, I don't know. What did I make for them? I don't even remember. [Short pause] Uh, I made 'em an Absinthe Suisse. Then I ran out of Pernod. Um, Mandarine Napoleon and tonic, which is good. Bunch of other things I don't remember. I make these things up when I go along.

[COUNTER: 14:49]

AE: So do you like to perform? Is that something you like about your job? To be kind of on stage?

PG: Well that's what it is. Basically. Do I like it? I don't know. I guess.

AE: Do you think you're good at it?

PG: Does it have—that has something to do with whether or not you have a good night.

AE: Yeah.

PG: It's like, you know, when people walk in and sit at the bar like [sighs and makes face] you know they're bored and they don't want to talk to you then—I go look out the window. Or I go do something else, you know. But if you have people at the bar that respond to what you do, that's always a lot more fun, and that has to do with performing. Because you're always on stage. People are always watching what you're doing. Which doesn't bother me. And there's a lot of people that come and sit at the bar and watch me make drinks. Because they've never—I don't know—they whether—I don't know. They might drink at Wendy's [fast food restaurant] or something. I don't know.

AE: Well, and I—

PG: And they've never seen how you make a—the weirdest I've ever had was ten college kids who didn't know how to make a Bloody Mary because they had never seen a Bloody Mary made from scratch.

AE: They'd only used the mix?

PG: Which I thought was kind of weird.

AE: Yeah.

PG: I mean it's like, "Where do you go?" You know? No, they're used to Mr. T's [Bloody Mary Mix] or whatever that stuff is. But, um—

AE: Well I saw you today when you came on your—your shift and you rearranged the bar from—from Greg's bar—

PG: I'm left-handed.

AE: Yeah? Okay. [Laughs] Well, you could tell. I mean it was a completely different type of set-up.

PG: Yeah. Well, they never set the bar up the same way. I never—I've set this bar up the same way since I've worked here. Everything is exactly in the same spot. That's why I can do this with my eyes shut. Which I have been doing because I had an eye operation; I couldn't see out of my right eye for the last six weeks.

AE: Oh, man.

PG: So I almost did it blindfolded. But it's, uh—because it makes things easier on you. If you know where everything is, you don't have to think about it. If you have to think about how—where is the gin, then you've lost—when you get really busy—you've already lost time trying to locate whatever it is that you're looking for. You need to be able to just put your hand out and there it is. And that's, you know, this bar but Tujague's as well. Yeah. That's one of the first things—I trained a bartender here, and I told him, "Go sit at the other end of the bar." He goes, "Why?" I said, "Look where everything is." Well, he looked where everything is, immediately forgot everything and never was any good at what he did. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

PG: You know? He's not here any more. He quit.

AE: Uh-oh.

PG: He went and became a firefighter.

AE: Oh.

PG: In California.

AE: That's' quite different.

PG: [To] fight forest fires. Well, I wouldn't do that but—[Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

PG: You know?

AE: Well what do you like best about your job here at the Napoleon House, specifically?

PG: Well, like I said, sometimes I like everything, sometimes I don't like anything. It really—specifically?

[An employee walks up to the table where we are sitting]

EMPLOYEE: [To Paul] Do you have any empty envelopes?

PG: [Paul digs around for an envelope]

EMPLOYEE: That yellow one? Yeah, that's good. Thank you.

PG: Um [short pause] I like the fact that we don't have a television. No games, no television. We don't get sports-crazed people in here. I mean, we do get 'em in here, but they don't stay. Which is fine with me because when somebody asks me who won the game, I always think it's a trick question.

AE: [Laughs]

PG: Because I never know what game they're talking about. I don't know if they're talking about football or whatever. Because I don't watch any sports. So I really, really like that. Uh, another thing I like is that, uh, the owner basically leaves you alone. I come in, I do my job, I go home. He doesn't care what I do when I'm not here.

AE: Yeah.

PG: That's, you know, and that's up to me. As long as I come in, I do what I have to do, and I do it the correct way. And it's the same thing at Tujague's too. They just—they leave you alone. You come in, do your job and then you go home. That's all they want. And I've always liked that. That's why I can't work at a big company. I worked for the Brennan's for two to three years,

and I *hated* those people. They're *such* assholes, it's *unbelievable*. Because they give their employees just enough so that they can—so that they stay, and they think they are special. Give them just a little bit of insurance, a little bit of this, a little bit of that, you know. I just—but that's too big of a company. I like the smaller places.

AE: Yeah. What about the history of this place? Is that—

PG: It's old!

AE: —appealing to you at all? Or is it part of—

PG: It's old. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs] Yeah, I know it's old. [Laughs]

PG: Is it appealing? Yeah. I mean, ppffhh! You know? Yeah, actually, yes, it is appealing. You know why? Because it shows you how *stupid* people are.

AE: [Laughs]

PG: I mean, [do] you know how many people I've told that Napoleon actually sat at this bar, and that's the reason why they have high chairs at—at bars?

AE: [Big laugh]

PG: Because he was too short to reach the bar. And they all go [leans over the table for emphasis], "Oh, really?!" Yeah? You want me to tell you the dumbest story?

AE: Please. [Short laugh]

PG: There's tow of them.

AE: Okay.

[COUNTER: 20:00]

PG: Two guys walk in, look around, they got through the line [to be seated], they sit at the bar and they say, "Where else in New Orleans did Napoleon live before he moved to this place?" And I went like, "Uh-oh." And I said, "Well, he never did live in New Orleans. He never made it. He died in exile before he could come to New Orleans." "Well, where in exile did he die?" I said, "Saint Helena's." They go, "Oh, Washington state."

AE: [Laughing] Oh, no!

PG: That's sad.

AE: Yeah, it is.

PG: That's really sad. The other one is, this is—has—we play classical music only [at the Napoleon House]. This guy walks in, [he's real] polite, takes his cap off, stands at the bar, waits for me to finish what I'm doing, comes up to me and goes—and I said, "Can I help you?" And he says, "When does your music start?" I said, "I'm sorry, we don't have live music." So he puts his hat back on, and he kind of grows a couple of inches because he's mad at me because he knows I'm lying to him. And he says, "Friends of mine were in here six months ago, and they said Beethoven played here!" I said, "I'm sorry, he quit."

AE: [Laughs]

PG: So on the way out I hear him say, "You know, I knew that asshole was lying to me!" But you know, I mean, if you have people—and this—those are just two of the—of the examples I gave you. I can name you *numerous* examples like that. But people, they just have *no clue*. None. And, you know, when they go to Wendy's [fast food restaurant] or [short pause] Outback Steakhouse or whatever, they don't have to deal with any of that stuff. And they come into a place like this, which was built in 1797 and they go like, "Oh, wow!" And they just really—they don't know. They have *no clue*.

AE: Yeah.

PG: But I never tell anybody I'm from the Netherlands. I've had people ask me if that was north of Alaska!

AE: [Laughs]

PG: I had somebody ask me if that was in South America! So I tell them I'm from here. I tell them I grew up uptown. Because it's just not—or another one is that they found out that I'm not from here—they found out I grew up in a country that didn't speak English? They stand on their tiptoes and start speaking slowly and loudly [Paul leans over the table and speaks in a loud voice for emphasis], so I can understand them. You know? It's like the ugly American thing is if you speak loud enough and slow enough, they'll figure it out.

AE: [Sighs]

PG: So it's, you know, so I'm from here [Laughs]

AE: Yeah.

PG: I tell everybody that: "I'm from uptown." If people are from uptown, I'm from down there—the lakefront, you know. It's so much easier. It's basically what I would want to do.

AE: Did you ever think you would end up in New Orleans tending bar?

PG: I'm sorry?

AE: Did you ever think you'd end up in New Orleans tending bar?

PG: Nope. Nope. I got the, uh—I came to New Orleans, like I said, I was going to stay here about a couple of weeks. And then I met the lady that was gonna be my first wife. And we got married. Well actually we got married years later. But so I needed a job. So, you know, in New Orleans at that time, if you need a job, you work in the kitchen. So I worked in the kitchen, I wasn't making any money, and one day I'm sitting in the bar, and I'm going, "Oh, shit. I can do that." So I went and got a job as a bartender. That's it. Did I ever think—I didn't—I never thought I would ever end up in New Orleans—ever.

AE: Yeah?

PG: I didn't think I'd end up in the United States. I didn't know where I was going to end up. I mean, the reason I came to the United States was because I flipped a coin. Took an atlas of the world and flipped a coin, and it was that way [points to his right]. So I went and bought a ticket to New York City. That's how I ended up [in New Orleans] eventually. And then I traveled around for two years. Hitchhiked around and then I ended up in—in New Orleans.

AE: And are you going to stick it out for the long haul?

PG: I don't know. Twenty-three years [I've been here]? I guess.

AE: Yeah?

PG: Yeah. I have a seven year-old now, so I'm not going anywhere. [Short pause] I have to take her to school every day. That's where I go.

AE: Yeah?

PG: Yeah.

AE: What if she decides to tend bar?

PG: Oh, that's not gonna happen. [Big laugh]

AE: [Big laugh]

PG: That's not gonna happen.

AE: Alrighty then.

PG: Because, you know, there's a whole lot of—of—there's a whole lot of good things about this [job], but there's a whole lot of bad things about this. About the bar business, restaurant business, service industry—whatever you want to call it. And—and the bad things don't outweigh the good things, but the bad things are what a lot of people have as a lasting impression. [Short pause] You know, if you have a hundred people come in, ninety-seven of them are nice. Do you remember them? No-oh! Two of them were so drunk they fall over. Well do you remember them? No. You know who you remember? The one asshole. And you know why? Because instead of him saying, "Thank you very much," like the ninety-seven other people did, he has an attitude. He yells and screams and complains about everything you—he—I mean, you fill in the blanks on what he does or doesn't do. And those are the people you remember. And that is really sad. That is *really*, really bad. That those are the people in this industry [that] we remember. And the problem with that is that after a while, you think that everybody's an asshole. [Short pause] There are no nice people anymore. You know, when people come in and go, "May I have a beer?" I kind of go like, "Wow!" because I'm not used to that.

[COUNTER: 25:17]

AE: Yeah.

PG: I mean they don't go like, "Hey! Yo!" Because I'll throw them out [if they approach me like that]. You know, but that doesn't exist anymore. People don't—people basically are not polite anymore. And those are the people you remember. And that is not—that is really bad. That is not good.

AE: Well what about that—

PG: That is not good. Because then—

AE: —contrasted with the cocktail culture that is kind of this civilized—I mean, ide—ideally speaking—

PG: Ideally speaking?

AE: Yes—

PG: Yeah, but the thing is—

AE: —cocktail culture—

PG: I mean, the cocktail culture right now the way it is, is a bunch of morons throwing stuff together and calling it martinis.

AE: Do you think that there's a resurgence of—of that kind of cocktail culture here in New Orleans right now?

PG: In some places, yes. In some—and I'm not saying—when I say places, I don't mean specific areas. I probably mean specific bars.

AE: Like?

PG: Where people actually go in and still drink Old Fashioneds. Or they drink the real martinis. Or they drink, uh, Negronis or Sidecars and stuff like that. This is one of them. We've never lost that. We've *always* had people come here specifically to drink something they can't get anywhere else. Or it's not as good as anywhere else. You know, that's—that's—yes, that's definitely true. But it's not—there's not that many places where that happens. You know? That's why I actually appreciate when these people from the [cocktail] museum come in and—because they actually order—

AE: Do you think it's a generational thing or a thing—

PG: Yeah.

AE: —specific to New Orleans? Or a trend?

PG: No, no, it's a generational thing.

AE: Yeah.

PG: Because people, you know—because twenty years ago people started going out, and they used to drink what their parents drank. And they were like, "Ooh, this is nasty." And they started drinking something else. And now, it's that same thing with the—with the martini craze. You know, you put vodka with pineapple and chocolate liquor and whatever and call it something, and it's a martini. It's not a martini! A martini is gin with vermouth in it! A dry martini is French vermouth and Ital—and a wet martini is Italian vermouth. That's another thing that people don't do anymore. And it's, uh—but like I said, there are places where people are really going back to the old drinks. [Short pause] But not that much.

AE: What places [short pause] are some of those?

PG: What's that?

AE: What are some of those places?

PG: Well in New Orleans, it's basically this place and then, uh, perhaps The Columns Hotel. *Perhaps.* Another one *might* be the, uh—the, uh, Carousel Bar at the Monteleone [Hotel]. But that's, you know—oh, Felix Café—little bit. You know, because they have clientele that they've been going in there for thirty years.

AE: Yeah.

PG: So that hasn't changed. Well it's the same as here, those things haven't changed. They've always been like that. You know. But otherwise—there's probably bars in New York and San Francisco and places like that [short pause] that haven't changed and are still the same.

AE: Is there a—here in New Orleans—like an industry hangout where people go? Bartenders like yourself go and hangout and—

PG: [Sighs] Um.

AE: —swap stories?

PG: Swap stories? No, I don't do that.

AE: Swap recipes?

PG: No. Don't do that either.

AE: Bitch and complain? [Laughs]

PG: No, I don't do that either. I do whatever—

AE: Drink cream soda? [Paul had a can of cream soda in front of him during the interview.]

PG: Right. [Short laugh] I really don't do that because, you know, the thing is—is when I leave here, I don't drink anymore. I have a kid at home. I just—I just go home.

AE: Yeah.

PG: And when I did go out after work, and went out drinking, we never really talked about how—you know, "Did you have a good night?" "Yes." "Okay, fine." That was it. We didn't talk about any—at length about [short pause] [assumes grumbling voice] "Oh, I got that asshole on table four-A," whatever. We, you know—I never did.

AE: Yeah.

PG: You know, I never did that. We'd go out and have fun. Stay out until some un-Godly time early in the morning. And then do it again the next day. Uh, are there places where bartenders go to? Yeah, but they change. Like, you know, the Chart Room closes late so a lot of people go there. In the—in the CBD [Central Business District] is uh, Vic's Kangaroo Café is open late. There's a whole bunch of people that go there. Uh, it really depends [on] the area that people work in. That's—then they find a late bar [and] that's where they go. We're not a late bar.

AE: Yeah.

PG: Obviously. You know, we just—not anymore. We used to be. But—

[Short pause]

AE: How many Pimm's Cups do you think you serve in a day? In a shift?

PG: Four hundred and ninety-three. I don't know!

AE: [Laughs]

PG: [Laughs] A lot!

AE: Yeah?

[COUNTER: 30:07]

PG: Yeah. We sell—we used to get—when Pimm's was an independent, uh [short pause] distillery, I guess. I don't know what a—I guess. Um, we used to get a plaque every year saying that we sold the most Pimm's of any establishment in the world. We don't get that anymore.

AE: [Laughs]

PG: I don't know if that's because we don't sell the most Pimm's of any establishment in the world anymore, but I think it's because they were taken over by a bigger company.

AE: Oh, right.

PG: And they really don't care. Yeah, the owner went to, uh, Pimm's thingy years ago. You know, the invited him, and he went.

AE: Uh-huh. Sal [Impastato].

PG: And so that was interesting.

AE: Was that Sal.

PG: Um-hmm. It was fun. Yeah, people come here for Pimm's all the time.
[Short pause] That's the—

AE: Do you think that's a good drink? Do you like it?

PG: Oh, I think it's a great drink. Especially in the summer. It's real—it's real refreshing, real nice. And you can drink a few of them without falling over drunk. Because in the summer you have to be real careful. It's really, really hot.

AE: Yeah.

PG: You go inside and you drink a bunch of Sazeracs or whatever, then you go outside, you know, things happen.

AE: What about like at Mardi Gras and—

PG: We're closed.

AE: Are you, really?

PG: Yep.

AE: Oh.

PG: We're closed—we close Sunday night and Monday night anyway. And Tuesday [on] Mardi Gras, we're closed. We're not open.

AE: Oh.

PG: They had a fight in here in 1948, so they closed.

AE: Oh, really? That did it, huh?

PG: Yep.

AE: What happened at that fight? Any details?

PG: People got beat up, the owner didn't like it, he threw them out, closed the doors.

AE: [And] that was the end of it. Huh.

PG: That was it.

AE: Well, all right.

PG: I really don't think they've ever been open on Mardi Gras since then.

AE: Huh.

[Short pause]

PG: You know, and this is not a place where people would come to anyway.

AE: Yeah.

PG: It's—it's kind of—I mean you go to Bourbon Street; you go to Decatur Street. Hang out and get stupid.

AE: Yeah.

PG: But, uh, that's another thing we get. We get a lot of people that walk in and look around and [then say] "Look! Wow, this is great! Let's stay." Or they walk in and kind of go like [has confused look on his face], "What the hell is this?!" And they leave.

AE: [Short laugh]

PG: Which is fine, they should leave. You know? But most places don't have that. Most places have people that don't really want to be there. They sit down anyway, and then you might have a problem with them. Here, it's like, "Eh, I don't like this place. Let's go." So they leave. Which is perfect.

AE: [Laughs]

PG: What else [do] you want? I don't have to throw them out, you know?
[Laughs]

AE: [Laughs]

PG: And we are fairly strict on—on a lot of things. Like [if] you curse, you gotta go. If you're obnoxious, you gotta go. If you're *loud* and obnoxious, you *definitely* have to go. No, we throw people out. We've even—one group for Christmas, I think it was. I come in one day and Sal was not happy. I said, "What's going on." He says, "It's these people on the patio." There were forty people on the patio that started mooning each other.

AE: [Quiet laugh]

PG: So we threw them all out.

AE: Wow.

PG: Because it's—you know, there's people with kids or whatever. Or people that don't want to see that! You know, go to Bourbon Street if you want to do that.

AE: Yeah.

PG: That's—not here. No, we're fairly strict on stuff like that. Which is fine with me. I enforce that law very well.

[Short pause]

AE: Something about me believes that.

PG: What's that?

AE: [Laughs] Something about me believes that. [Laughs]

PG: Yeah.

AE: [Laughing]

PG: When people say, "You ever asked anybody to leave?" "No."

AE: Tell them [to leave]? Yeah. [Laughs]

PG: Uh-uh. I had some people the other day that were kind of obnoxious. I went over and they goes, "You're going to throw us out, aren't you?" I said, "No, I'm not." And he goes, "Oh, not?" I said, "No, you're going to get up and leave voluntarily. Bye!"

AE: [Laughs]

PG: And they did! You know?

AE: Excellent.

PG: I mean we don't have *that* many people that we—that we have problems with.

AE: Yeah.

PG: Because most people, they—they're realize when they—they're—that they're being obnoxious, and they—you know, when you leave here, there's three thousand other bars that you can go to.

AE: Right.

PG: [Speaking under his breath] And I've been thrown out of a few bars myself.

AE: [Laughs]

PG: But [short pause] I just leave, you know? [Laughs]

AE: Yeah.

PG: Don't argue. Just leave. Go somewhere else.

AE: [Short laugh]

[Short pause]

AE: Well, um, might there be anything that I haven't asked you about that you'd—

PG: I have no idea.

AE: —like to comment on or [short pause] some final thoughts?

PG: I don't have any final thoughts. I'm not dead yet.

AE: [Short laugh] Okay. Good enough.

PG: [Laughs] That's another thing people ask me all the time: "Have you lived here all—your whole life?" I say, "No! I'm still alive!"

AE: [Laughs]

PG: You know? [Laughing] No!

AE: All right. Well I see you're closing your money bin there, so I'll let you count it—

PG: All right.

AE: —and, uh, Paul, I appreciate your time.

PG: You're welcome.

AE: Thank you so much.

[COUNTER: 34:46]

[END]