

**PAUL PRUDHOMME**  
**New Orleans, LA**

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Interviewer: Brett Anderson, *The Times-Picayune*

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

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**[Begin Paul Prudhomme]****00:00:00**

**Brett Anderson:** I got to know Chef Paul starting about five—six years ago when I was working on an oral history about his career at—about his career in the culinary arts. And my—my interest in it was—was mainly that my feeling that he’s sort of in the past fifty years in the—in the United States and perhaps the world, there are a few people who have accomplished as much in the—in the world of culinary arts as—as Chef Paul.

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And—and I’m just going to read an introduction I did to the oral history and then we’re going to get some questions.

**00:00:36**

*In 1957 a hamburger joint called Big Daddy-O’s Patio in Opelousas, Louisiana; its owner was a naïve newly married seventeen year-old, the youngest of thirteen children who grew up on a farm outside of town. He went by Gene Autry Prudhomme still unaware that Paul was the name on his birth certificate, there by a baptismal priest who insisted that the boy share a name with a Saint.*

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*Save for the fact that Prudhomme ground his own meat to insure his hamburger contained as he put it the proper amount of fat—of moisture, nothing about Big Daddy-O’s suggested that its owner would one day become the most famous American restaurant chef in the world.*

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*Less than a year after the burger joint opened, it closed. Prudhomme subsequently came to New Orleans, not to cook but to sell magazines. The job too him out West where he eventually*

*landed back behind the stove; for a decade he bounced from restaurant kitchen to restaurant kitchen mostly in Colorado, where the Cajun was never once asked to prepare—prepare his native cuisine.*

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*The realization of this food that he learned to cook that his mother said was foreign to people outside of Southern Louisiana prompted him in 1970 to move back to New Orleans. The city and this profession would never be the same.*

**00:01:44**

*Prudhomme's upward career trajectory hit a steep incline in 1975 when he became the first American-born executive chef at Commander's Palace and shot into the stratosphere after he and his second wife, K Hinrichs opened K Paul's Louisiana Kitchen which is on the verge of I believe celebrating its thirty-second year in business. **[Applause]***

**00:02:02**

*At the peak of the 1980s—at the peak of the 1980s, Prudhomme's profile cast a shadow even over such culinary legends as Julia Childs and James Beard. And there was no restaurant real precedent for the celebrity that he enjoyed. The chef started several cooking shows and home videos, was a regular on local and national TV, appeared on magazine covers, and became a best-selling cookbook author a decade before chefs such as Emeril Lagasse, his heir at Commander's Palace ushered in the age of the celebrity chef.*

**00:02:35**

*His book, Chef Paul Prudhomme's Louisiana Kitchen is widely considered a—a classic in the culinary arts. Without ever finding successes, a multi-unit operator, Prudhomme managed to get his food tasted by the masses. With his Magic Seasoning and Blend spice line, he has insured that with his Magic Seasonings and Blend spice line he has insured that home cooks can*

*closely duplicate the flavors from his kitchen, and became a pioneering chef-entrepreneur in the bargain.*

**00:03:02**

*What began with Paul—with Prudhomme employees stuffing baggies with homemade spices for sale in the restaurant has mushroomed into a full line of products that are sold all over the world.*

**00:03:12**

*He helped ignite a revolution in American gastronomy, inspiring chefs and diners to embrace regional cuisine and fresh local ingredients. By uncovering opportunities for chefs outside their restaurant kitchens he transformed his profession. In growing influence beyond the parish line he profoundly altered the dining landscape of New Orleans and he found a national/international audience for local chefs and restaurateurs pushing Louisiana, particularly New Orleans onto the map of great culinary destinations.*

**00:03:41**

So all that is by way of introduction to Chef Paul. And as I was telling you when we were eating tonight, this group here today is—a lot of people flew in here from out of town to take a pilgrimage to Cajun Country and you are associated with—with popularizing Cajun Country cuisine more than anyone really who has ever lived, and I think I've sort of shared the lion's share of the lion's share of the blame for the fact that this sold out in about thirty-five seconds. **[Laughs]** But I think it needs to be said in light of all that you, yourself don't consider your food to be Cajun food. You—and you can correct me if I'm wrong, but you prefer the more broad term *Louisiana food*. And I was wondering if you could explain that a little bit about why you prefer that—that characterization.

00:04:34

**Paul Prudhomme:** Hello, everybody. [*Applause*] My name is Paul Prudhomme and I'm a cook. And I mean that very, very strongly; I mean that.

00:04:49

I think that cooking is one of the most important things you can do for—for a living and the way I feel about it is the fact that you can make people happy with what you do and you can put really good things into their body as—as you're doing that. And that's all I ever wanted to be over the years was to give the best food I possibly could to anybody who's there to buy it from me and it's—it's what I'm doing now and—and I'll do it until I die. It's what I love to do. My job in my company is doing research and development and what that means is that we have customers all over the world who want some good seasoning blends and it's my job to do that. And that's what I do.

00:05:59

Should we see if we can plug it in and see if it will get louder?

00:06:03

**BA:** I don't really know what you're asking but sure. Is this a better sound? It is. But Chef, the—to the point of the—well let's do it this way; let's back up a bit. You—when you first started in the chef profession you started at a young age but it didn't take. You—you left and then came back. I'm curious at the age of seventeen when you opened a restaurant, what were your—at that point in your life what was your motivation? Had you been—did you eat in restaurants in Opelousas growing up that you had—that you could model what you were doing after? Can you tell me a little bit about what was—what was happening at that point in your life?

**00:06:54**

**PP:** Well my family—I was the thirteenth child and when I was about seven years old my mom and dad bought a grocery store outside of Opelousas, Louisiana and—and I worked in that grocery store and I went to school. And when I got out of school I decided that I wanted to be a cook and I wanted to be my own cook. And so one of the—actually a—a company that did—did a lot of music into restaurants and into bars and they built me a—a restaurant that I could—and they would put their machines in it. And I did that. And I got married. And nine months later I didn't have any kids, I didn't have a wife, and I didn't have a restaurant. **[Laughs]**

**00:08:14**

I remember—I remember going to mom and dad's house which is about a mile away and I sat outside realizing I was a failure and I just kept thinking about it. And it was probably—I was sitting there in the day and the night and—in a rocking chair in front of the house and—and when it was over I realized that that's what I wanted to do is be a cook. And I needed to learn about it and I needed to get another restaurant so I could learn more because I had learned what not to do—at least at the beginning of the first restaurant.

**00:09:03**

And I had three restaurants after that—that failed. And you know it was the kind of thing that I would pay my bills and go back and do some more.

**00:09:17**

And so it's—it's sort of been my life and it's going to be my life until I die, to be able to deliver great food to—to the people that's willing to pay for it. **[Laughs]**

**00:09:37**

**BA:** Can you talk a little bit about, you've mentioned to me before in conversations the cooking of your mother and—and whatnot. Do you have—can you share some early memories of—of the food that you ate at home, who was in charge of making it, and I imagine that has to be—had been an inspiration to that moment in the rocking chair; could you talk a little bit about that food and some early memories of it?

**00:10:04**

**PP:** There's—there's a lot of memories but one that really made a difference to me was that you know kids fight a lot and but my dad was very tough. And I mean when I say really tough, I mean really tough; he'd knock you down. There's no doubt. I mean he—if—if you didn't do what he said he would hit you hard enough that you would go down. And he wouldn't pick you up. He'd just walk away from you, you know. And I—I remember that—that you know going to—they'd be out in the yard and they'd be fighting, they'd be having fun, they'd be doing stuff and you'd go back in the house and everybody had to sit down because if—if—if you didn't sit down before my dad did then you didn't eat that—that meal. And—and it wasn't a vicious thing; it was the thing that he believed in and that—there was no refrigeration, there was no—you know we didn't have electricity; we didn't have any of that kind of stuff at that time. And you know we—I would watch my brothers and sisters sit down at the table, been outside fighting or you know being mad at each other or whatever and they would start eating mother's food and halfway through or so everybody had forgotten that they were mad. **[Laughs]** And I—I just could not you know—I mean that—that was one of the marks of my life in realizing how powerful really good food is.

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And—and I've been trying to at least do that—do that good with food as I possibly can for the rest of my life. And I try to do that every day. And—and the—the people that want to buy our seasoning or people that want to know about it you know I'm willing to show them how to do it and I'm willing—'cause I can't—I can't feed everybody in the world. And so I'm willing to share it.

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**BA:** Well as a—as a young man you—you moved to New Orleans and then eventually moved out west where you did some cooking as well. Did you ever see anything like the food you grew up with anywhere outside of Cajun country back in those days?

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**PP:** No, I—I—the food that—that I had to do as—because they were paying me to do it and I had to do what the—what the chef said or the owner said and—and I would do it. I mean I wanted to be a cook and be there. But I would feed the staff. I would feed the—the kids and I would feed the waiters and—and the kitchen. And it was amazing; if I had been a drinker I could have had all the alcohol in the world from the waiters [*Laughs*] from the food that we would give them. And but I wasn't—you know like I said I stopped drinking alcohol after—after mother quit putting it—putting it down and making it. But it's—it's what I've done all my life and it's—it's really a—you know I've really had an incredible wonderful life over the years of doing what I love to do.

**00:13:53**



**BA:** What—in 1970, I believe it is, you—you came back to New Orleans and opened up a restaurant at the Maison Dupuy [hotel in New Orleans]. You were talking with a gentleman at the table about that earlier. You had once mentioned to me that—that was the first time you made your version of Louisiana food. And I wonder if you could tell—tell us a little bit about what that menu was like at that—at that particular restaurant and as well, the reaction people had to it. Did they find it exotic?

**00:14:34**

**PP:** Well it's—it was a long time ago, so—. I'm not sure if—if I could tell you the truth, but I knew one thing is that—is that—is that what we did at that restaurant made it immediately a—a big, big restaurant that people were waiting to come in every night to eat there. And it was—it was—it was fun, it was great; I could do—the owner of it, he was a City Councilman here in the city and he let me do exactly what I wanted to in the kitchen. And it—it just was a—it was a—sort the beginning of me understanding that's what I wanted to do the rest of my life.

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**BA:** It was—I don't exactly the year, you can share that—that you met Ella Brennan. I believe you—there was a little bit of a detour in there from the—from the Maison Dupuy to being hired at Commander's Palace, which was obviously a turning point in your career. And I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about how you met Ella Brennan and—and how you came to become the chef at Commander's Palace.

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**PP:** The—there was a lady, Shawn, do you remember her name? Fletcher, yeah; Terry Fletcher—Terry Fletcher was—was—was at WYES Television and she had been there for—for a very long time and she was a light of the city. She was a wonderful woman and she just cared about food and about—about what she did. And she had—she brought me to Commander’s Palace and I met Ella Brennan for the first time. And we hit it off because we both believed that what we should do in a restaurant is have fresh stuff and have it the best we possibly could.

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And after being with—with her and Ella for a couple of hours, about probably two months after Ella called me and—and she said—are you, you know are you—do you have a place to cook? And I—I was—I was—I was doing you know we’d have people come to—to the—lady’s name—Fletcher, yeah Terry, and I should remember her name. I was—I was a partner with her for a while and she—she had a place where we could show people how to cook. And so we—we were doing that. And then Ella called and said can you come help us at Commander’s because the chef had left and things are going bad? And so I went over and started working with her and I really wanted to continue on what I was doing, teaching people about food.

**00:18:17**

And I remember she said to me, bless her heart, she’s a wonderful woman, she—she said to me I’d like for you to be the chef after some time. And I said I don’t think I want to do that. And she said well, I think you should think about it and you know. And now I liked her a lot and I like her today. And so I said well, if—if—in my head I said if I ask her for so much money you know then she’ll say no and then I can [*Laughs*]—she would get another chef and because she had been looking for one for—for a while. And—and so I asked for this enormous amount of

money. I remember—I don't remember what it was but it wasn't—it wasn't millions; it was like you know probably \$60,000 or something like that [*Laughs*]. I don't know what it was.

**00:19:10**

But after I told her what you know what I wanted she kind of got pale [*Laughs*] and so I went away you know and started cooking. And about two hours later one of her—one of her brothers, Dickie Brennan, Dick Brennan came over and—and—and said you know Ella wants to talk to you. And so—and I think we have a Brennan here tonight. Where are you—? [*Applause*]

**00:19:55**

He's a great guy. But—but you know we—we decided—you know she said we'll pay you what—what you know what you want. And I was there for five years and it was one of the best five years that I have ever—ever—ever been before. And Ella taught me more about how to make money in a restaurant that—that is now getting me to where I have the businesses that I have now and I—I think of it as being her. I think of it as being her that taught me how to do that, you know. And she had some wonderful things she would say—is that *it's nothing wrong with making a buck*. [*Laughs*]

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**BA:** The—when you got hired at—at Commander's Palace it was—it was unprecedented on a couple of levels. At the time my understanding is that it was pretty rare, if not unheard of for a chef of a restaurant of that stature to be not European and specifically not French. And furthermore it was not a lot of precedence, I don't know of any of—in New Orleans of there being a Cajun chef. And I wonder if you—if you have a recollection at all of—this clearly wasn't a problem for Ella. I mean you made her pale and she still paid you the money and—and the—.

But I wonder was it a problem for—for staff, do you remember or—or customers, if there was a period of adjustment there.

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**PP:** You know that's been a long time ago and you know I—I know that you know she said to me that once we got Commander's going that when I—I'd go to the other restaurants and they had one in—three or four outside of the city and we did some of that. And but it was basically to my—I mean I love Commander's Palace and I loved being there and it was very—it was very sad when I left.

**00:22:19**

**BA:** Now you—as you had mentioned, you were at Commander's for five years. And you—you left ultimately to open K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen. And I—you know I was not—I've been to Commander's Palace and I've been to K-Paul's. I had not been to either of those restaurants at that time, but I do feel like it's safe to assume K-Paul's was a much different type of restaurant than—than Commander's Palace. And can you tell us a little bit about what your—your inspiration was to—to move away from this great experience at Commander's, you know and take a risk to go off on your own but also to open a restaurant that really didn't have much—too much precedence?

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**PP:** Well I'll try to be just really straight up and say that you know all I cared about was the food. I didn't care what the—I mean Commander's Palace was a beautiful place, you know and

they had great covers on the tables and they had great chairs and you know it was—it was classy you know.

**00:23:24**

K-Paul's was a joint, you know. It was feed. It was: here it is. You know and if you don't like it don't come back, you know. I mean it's—we got—we got a whole lot of people waiting in line for us you know. **[Laughs]** And we actually—we actually had to at a point we—we would because we only had seventy-two seats and there would be a line that was literally around the corner and so we started putting couples together that didn't know each other at the restaurant. And of course now it's totally different. You know now it's a big restaurant. It seats over 300 people and everything is reservation and you know that kind of thing. But it was—at that beginning it was just—it was just amazing 'cause all I wanted to do was do great food, food that would make people happy and that responded to me of my culture and what mother taught me and you know what the family taught me.

**00:24:35**

**Female:** You did. You did.

**00:24:39**

**BA:** Yeah, amen. Frank Brigsten, who worked with you both at Commander's and K-Paul's, once told me that the—and has Brigsten's Restaurant, which is a wonderful place. He once told me that the first time andouille sausage ever entered Orleans Parrish was when—you know in the backseat of your car basically. **[Laughs]** Is that—can you talk a little bit about when you opened K-Paul's it was—you were serving a kind of food that New Orleans was not accustomed to even though it was South Louisiana food? Did you—can you tell us a little bit about the sourcing in

the early days? Did you have to go to Cajun country to get—get the andouille and the tasso and things like this?

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**PP:** Well I had the—the good fortune of having a big family and a lot of nephews [*Laughs*].

And so they would—they would actually go around three times a week and pick up stuff from—from people that grew any kind of vegetables, chickens, ducks, you know all that kind of stuff and they would—they would clean it in—in Opelousas and they would bring it—bring it to the restaurant. And we did that probably for the first—I really don't remember, but probably the first three to five years that most of the food came from—like from Acadiana from the Lafayette area and that Opelousas area and it was brought to me by the family.

**00:26:18**

**BA:** What—in those days the—the term *farm to table* wasn't a—I don't think anyone ever said that, I mean as far as I know.

**00:26:31**

**PP:** I don't even know what you're talking about. [*Laughs*]

**00:26:32**

**BA:** Well there we go. [*Laughs*] The—I guess what I'm interested in hearing about is prior to opening K-Paul's the way you've explained the way that you've run that restaurant in the way you just did sourcing locally, using vegetables and—and—and meat and so forth that's been—been raised locally, had you ever seen that in a restaurant prior to that—that you had worked in?

**00:27:03**

**PP:** No, I didn't. It was—I just knew that fresh was the most important thing. And that getting it from the family I knew it was—it was done right. I knew it was—it was harvested well and that you know—and it—it was so wonderful to—to cook and do things that I did as a kid with—with my mother and—and you know the family and that's what I was doing at the restaurant. I mean I was just—you know it was coming. They would bring it to me and—and I wanted to have—I never had a freezer in the restaurant and I still don't. And—and it's not—it's not because I'm afraid of them [*Laughs*]; it's because I know that if it's there they're going to put something in it and they're going to freeze it, and I don't want—I don't want to sell something that's been frozen. And I'm sure we do sell stuff that's been frozen that tricked us by but we try not to do that and we try never to do anything that's not been—that's not fresh.

**00:28:24**

**BA:** So you're not against freezers. You're just against using them? [*Laughs*]

**00:28:33**

**PP:** I think—I think they're great things. I mean I really do. I mean you know you get ice cream in them you know. I mean—you can get all kinds of really good stuff. Don't—you know don't put chicken in it. [*Laughs*]

**00:28:53**

**BA:** The—after opening K-Paul's you alluded to the fact that there was lines out the door and around the block and—and so forth. It was—it was a very popular place. Over some time you

started to branch out and appear on television and—and do things sort of outside the kitchen. And there was no model for that before you started being on TV. And I wondered like what is—what made you think you could swing that? **[Laughs]** We talked about the early days of being—

**00:29:33**

**PP:** Probably just you know not being very smart and **[Laughs]**. I'm kind of stupid about doing things that you know—I mean there—there were other people that had—had been doing. WYES was doing a weekly—a weekly thing there and—and I had—when I was at Commander's I had gone there a couple of times and then I was at K-Paul's. When someone—one of the chefs didn't show up they could call me because I'd be at the restaurant real early and they'd call me and say you know can you come over? And I'd go over and—and—and cook. And after about three or four times that happened they said to me, why don't you just do this every—I think it was Thursdays—Tuesdays or Thursdays and said why don't you just do that every Tuesday and Thursday? And I did that for—I don't remember how long but it was several—several times—several years.

**00:30:38**

And then Bryant Gumbel became—which was a gentleman that was from Louisiana and he was in—in New York and he asked me to come to cook there and—and on the—on the *Early Show* and I did that for I don't know—four years, five years.

**00:31:03**

**BA:** Did you notice after you went onto television that—what sort of effect did that have to the restaurant? Was it a—did you noticeably—did the lines get noticeably longer?



**00:31:15**

**PP:** Well it—it—it had already—it had already started with long lines and so I'm really not sure how much the—the television in—in New York did. I really don't. I don't remember that it made a big difference.

**00:31:41**

**BA:** What about opening up other opportunities for you? You know you ultimately—I don't—I don't know which came first, the cookbooks or television, but—but I imagine the attention that the restaurant got and the attention that New Orleans got as a consequence of your success had to open up opportunities for you in—in books and did that make ultimately it easier to transfer to becoming a spice entrepreneur? I guess my question is did—did you find that fame opened up opportunities for you that you wouldn't have otherwise expected?

**00:32:27**

**PP:** I would—I would have to say I think so. I didn't—I never wanted to be—I just wanted to be a cook you know and I wanted to be able to give great stuff for people to taste. And over the years when you know the customers would come to the restaurant and say what are you putting in your food? It tastes so good. And so when you tell them about the seasoning they'd say can we have some? And we'd put them in a—in a—in one of those bags we had in there and we'd give them, you know a handful of it. And they'd come back and say I want to buy some.

**00:33:12**

And—and then from there you know we had—we had a customer that was in—in Florida and decided we wanted to put it on the market, so we didn't know how to do that but he helped

us with it. And so it went from there and it went to you know went to up north and—and you know and then over the years it's gone on, you know thirty countries around the world.

**00:33:43**

**BA:** Now can you—I'm sure you're getting tired of being asked this question but I feel sort of duty-bound to ask you to comment a little bit about blackened—blackened fish which was one of the most popular items that you—you made at your restaurant and became sort of a cultural phenomenon and it—can you talk to it a little—say a little bit about what the inspiration for that was and—and the response that you saw—you saw in the restaurant?

**00:34:12**

**PP:** That's even further back. [*Laughs*] I remember—I remember when—when—when I was a kid I was working in—in Arizona, I think I was in—and we sort of burned it and it turned out to be really good, you know because I was—I was still doing seasoning even at—at that—you know at that time. I did—I'd buy seasoning and—and put it in my pocket [*Laughs*] and put it on things. But it—it started that way and we went through it many different times. And as a matter of fact when one of the—when one of the—the restaurants that I did for—for Ella, [**Mister B's**] yeah, it was—it was—I wanted to put the blackened in there and she said no. That wasn't a good—and she was right; you know it wasn't the right thing to do.

**00:35:28**

And so after that I had—I had gotten K-Paul's and it was only lunch and—breakfast and lunch and then you know my wife said to me, I can't do this by myself anymore. And—and so I resigned from the Brennan(s) and—and I went to the restaurant. And that's when the blackening started, but it had been—it had been around for a long time. You know I was trying to get people

to do that when I would—when I was just a cook. And you know they—they just didn't want to do that.

**00:36:10**

So when we started—when—when we started doing the blackening it got to a point where we had to tell the customer and—and that was the time when they were together people—two people that—you know four people that didn't know each other. And—and but they would have to—they would have to [*Laughs*]*—they would have to share the blackening fish at the restaurant because we'd only put one of them on—on the board because we had so many other things. You know we had so many other good things out there. And you know they would get upset about it and then after they'd start eating the food then they'd forget about it. [*Laughs*]* And—and you know they'd come back. So you know we did that for probably three years—two years, probably two years, but they only—you could only get the blackening as—as an appetizer.

**00:37:11**

**BA:** What is it—it's—it's been some time since you've been cooking day-to-day in the restaurant and you talk about it with such affection and you know not just K-Paul's but the times leading up to it. And I wondered if you—do you miss it?

**00:37:32**

**PP:** I—I guess you could say I do but on the other hand what I do on a—on a daily basis is to—I run the research and development kitchen and it's—it's right next to my house so it makes it easy, very convenient. And I've been doing that for a long time and it's—it's the most wonderful—it's the most wonderful thing for me because the thing that I love the most is doing

formulas or doing seasoning formulas and I do that every day now. And you know it makes the company money, so it's great. **[Laughs]**

**00:38:26**

**BA:** Do you get a lot of feedback from customers in that capacity with Magic Seasoning? Do you get that kind of satisfaction in the work that you do where you know restaurants you know there's this—this quick feedback; do you get that in the work that you do? I know you do a lot of public appearances and so forth.

**00:38:45**

**PP:** It's really simple. If they buy it **[Laughs]** I got it baby. **[Laughs]** I got the money; they got the seasoning. I want it stay exactly the way it is and I want to get the money too. **[Laughs]**

**00:39:02**

**BA:** That is his kind of response isn't it? **[Laughs]** You got—you know Shawn was saying earlier you still do television with WBSU, right?

**00:39:12**

**Female:** Now and then, yeah.

**00:39:12**

**BA:** Now and then, which is—and you know you're still in the public eye. But compared to when you started cooking you know by comparison to some of your colleagues in the restaurant world you're almost kind of as a recluse given how—how much that has become a part of the

show, career path. And a lot of times you see chefs that acquire that level of fame, there were even in clips I think of what you enjoy, whose accomplishments not really even remotely comparable. And I kind of just wondered what you thought about that, if you do think about that.

**[Laughs]**

**00:39:58**

**PP:** Actually I don't. You know I don't—I don't have—what I do now is the—the thing that I've always wanted to do and not that I knew about it. You know I mean over the years you just—there it is you know and I don't want to do anything else you know what I mean. I don't mind going on a road trip and—and you know I don't—I don't mind doing almost anything for the companies, but what I want to do is deliver seasonings. Every time we have blenders that do 5,000 pounds and 2,000 pounds and—and they roll out and every time—every time they roll out they have to send me a little container this size **[Gestures]** of that seasoning no matter whose seasoning it is. They have to send it to me so—at the research and development kitchen, so I can taste it, because I want every—every seasoning blend that goes out to be the best it can be. And so the way that I try to do that and I mean—I mean that—try to do that you know I mean we have these little containers this—this high **[Gestures]** and sometimes we got to do forty of them in a day and—and you know you—it's not that easy because you're tasting different kinds of seasonings. And so you know you—you get—your tongue gets burned out a little bit. **[Laughs]** But it's—it's a great thing to do for me and you know I'll continue doing it until I die.

**00:41:50**

**BA:** Do we have time to do some questions around?

**00:41:53**

**PP:** Sure.

**00:41:55**

**BA:** Do other people have questions?

**00:41:58**

**Question:** I do; I have a question. Chef Paul when—when you're really hungry at the end of the day what is it that you go home and put on your plate?

**00:42:07**

**BA:** She asked Chef Paul when he's really hungry at the end of the day what do you eat basically?

**00:42:18**

**PP:** [*Laughs*] You know how many—how many years ago since you've seen me?

**00:42:27**

**Question:** You look very different from the first time that I saw you. [*Laughs*]

**00:42:30**

**PP:** Well see, when you go from 580 pounds down to 200 you eat a lot of cereal. [*Laughs*]

**00:42:50**

**Question:** With your indulgence I'm going to tell a story. I'm Randy Fertel, and it's great to see you Chef Paul.

**00:42:58**

**PP:** Good to see you.

**00:42:59**

**Question:** You gave my mother a wonderful tribute right before she died in 2002. But I want to tell a story about Alice Waters who I met right after Katrina. And she said she wanted to do a project in New Orleans and so we—we built the edible schoolyard here. And but she told me that the reason she wanted to do that was because in 1978 I think right—right after the big wine-tasting in Europe where the American wines did well and the movie that's just come out, there was a—a big American cooking demonstration dinner in New York. And Chef Paul did Friday night and Alice was going to do Saturday night. And Paul came with his huge crew and he did a wonderful meal. And she told a story about he—he made this Creole cabin out of chocolate and inside were Ponchatoula strawberries and then he poured a hot sauvignon on—on the roof and he melted it. She said it was the best thing she ever ate. And whenever she tastes strawberries she says no, they're not as good as that.

**00:44:14**

And but she—she told me this story about how the next night she cleaned—playing with her lettuces on her wrap and still in the dirt and she had some lamb and that she had sourced you know beautifully as she does. And she had two cooks and they would—to feed 200 or 300 people. And Chef Paul showed up and said do you need some help? She said oh no, no; I'm fine—I'm fine. He says no; you need some help and he just started ordering his people to do this

and do that. And she—and she said—and the punch line is he saved my career. If he had not done that for me it would have been a disaster and there would be no Alice Waters.

**00:45:05**

**BA:** The question was in case you didn't hear was—why did Chef Paul choose—choose the red fish to blacken back in the day?

**00:45:17**

**PP:** Well everybody thought it wasn't a very good fish and—and so it was very cheap. It was actually—it was actually done more for—for baiting. They would get the red fish and—and use it—use it as bait. And I figured if the other fish liked it [*Laughs*] and they're willing to give their life up for it, for a bite of it then I should go ahead and do that. And—and it was cheap. I mean it was really inexpensive. I could get a lot of it. I could always get it fresh and that's what—that's why I did that one.

**00:46:01**

**BA:** Is there any other questions? The—well Chef Paul and Shawn you guys, thank you both very much for coming. This is a really special way to start off the weekend for everyone; and final words—?

**00:46:19**

**PP:** I'd like to introduce the President of our companies, Shawn McBride [*Applause*]. We met 100 years ago and then we didn't see each other for half of that time and then one day she popped up and said I want to come work with you. [*Laughs*] And—and she started Magic Seasoning and



Blends and has made an incredible—her and her team and her husband has done an incredible job for me and I can still be at the R&D and cooking and I mean she did it. Thank you Shawn.

**[Applause]**

**00:47:17**

**Shawn:** I—I feel like I’ve lived a lot of these stories with Paul and it’s—it—it touches my heart when I hear him talk about he’s—he’s an incredibly humble person as you can see.

**00:47:32**

**PP:** Don’t start.

**00:47:32**

**Shawn:** I’m not going to; I’m not going to. But we were talking about tonight at dinner that when I think of all the—we thought of all the protégés that he has that have come through his restaurants whether it was at Brennan’s or whether it was at K-Paul’s, or I met Paul in Colorado at a lodge in Estes Park. I would go there; I went there for the summer one year in 1970 and—to work in college and he was the chef there. And even going way back then there was something that was extremely unusual about him. He was never one of these chefs that would scream or yell or lose his temper in the kitchen. He was just very calm and as a matter of fact as he got quiet you really were afraid of him **[Laughs]** because we’d say he’s giving us the black eye and you’re in trouble.

**00:48:25**

But the—the—the years that I have seen the people come through his restaurant or the people that he has touched around the world, his mission always was to teach. And he’s an

excellent teacher. He—he doesn't give up. If he thinks you don't understand it he's going to make sure 'til you get it right. And so through the—through the restaurant with his wife, Kay and then as we moved on and—and the businesses built—that we had a meat plant and then the seasoning company and—and we traveled the world then he taught people not only how to cook but how to enjoy flavors and how to bring about bold flavors. And I think he and Alice and Wolfgang and that group of chefs are really the ones that have taken food around America and made it travel around the world and—and those bold flavors.

**00:49:23**

And I just—one little quick story. When I started with him in the seasoning company his brother was a blender. And in those days we didn't have computers and we just had big blenders and you had to dump everything and weigh it. And one day his brother came in and he said I have—he said I have twenty pounds of garlic powder here and I don't know whether I put too much in or too little in. And this was a 1,600-pound blend. I said oh Bobby it's not going to matter; twenty—you know twenty pounds, what can it matter? And then something said don't think that way. So I said okay; we're going to go into Paul. You don't say a word. I'll talk.

**00:50:00**

So he took it in [*Laughs*]—because I knew Bobby would spill his guts right away and then we'd never find out the truth. So we went in and I said Paul taste this. And his usual way of tasting is he tastes two—three times. But the third time he can tell you. And he tasted it and he said I think it needs about twenty more pounds of onion powder. [*Laughs*] That was my biggest lesson, as I went forward; don't ever—ever think that you can fool him or that you can get something by him because he—he's—. You know there's artists out there, there's musicians, there's painters, and he's an artist in my mind when it comes to food, because he has incredible taste buds. To go through tastings with him is—is just the most unique experience because he

teaches you what happens you know as it hits your mouth and then it hits the front part of your tongue and then it's in the back of your throat, and what—what emotion does it bring out of you. And I know; I'm sorry. *[Laughs]*

**00:51:09**

But anyway we all are foodies here tonight and—and that's what makes it special and—and when Brett said can you come and do this I thought it would be—it's just such a great way for—for him to share what he does with food and his passion for it. And—and I think everybody in this room has passion or they wouldn't be here tonight to—to share and as you go off into the country I know you're going to see more of that passion. The country has changed a lot but there still is—every place that makes gumbo thinks they're the best gumbo, you know. And so you'll learn that as you go up there if you haven't been up there before.

**00:51:46**

But thank you so much for the opportunity and we hope you have a great time in New Orleans. And if you don't it's not our fault because it's all here for you okay. Go out and do it *[Laughs]*; thank you. *[Applause]*

**00:52:10**

**BA:** What about—is Donald and them still here? Yeah, to sort of thank them—. Well anyway thank you Chef Paul and I know that the—that Donald and those guys are going to come out at some point and show you appreciation for the dinner. But thanks and you guys have a really great weekend. *[Applause]*

**00:53:02**

**[End Paul Prudhomme]**