

SHIRLEY CORRIHER
Atlanta, GA

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Date: February 5, 2005
Location: Cherokee Town Club – Atlanta, GA
Interviewer: Angie Mosier, SFA Member
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 48 minutes
Project: SFA Founders

[Begin Shirley Corriher Interview]**00:00:03**

Angie Mosier: This is Angie Mosier interviewing Shirley Corriher on Saturday, February 5, 2005 for the Southern Foodways Alliance Founders Oral History Project. Good to see you Shirley.

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Shirley Corriher: Great to be here.

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AM: Thank you. How did you come to be involved in the Southern Foodways Alliance?

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SC: Well I had been involved with a Southern food association that was a predecessor so to speak of this and it had a lot of chefs involved, Marcel Desaulniers and I remember an Anne Roberts from Boston I think. And they had—had several conventions that I had attended. And I thought it was so, so important. And you know I remember one of the conventions in Charleston and Vertamae Grosvenor and I were going to walk back to the hotel and—and Burt Green who was alive then had a fit. He said, “No, no, ladies; you have to let me escort you.” So we just had a riotous time with Burt escorting Vertamae and me to the hotel.

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And we—we got into some great discussion and had great differences of opinion and I remember us jumping up and down on the sidewalk. **[Laughs]** But I just thought you know we

need—and when that organization went defunct, I thought you know we—we—this is a great loss. We need a Southern food association; we really, really do.

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AM: Do you remember the name of the previous organization?

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SC: I don't exactly; let's see.

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AM: I was going to ask you—because the next question is—were you involved with either of the Southern food organizations that predated the SFA one being the Society for the Preservation and Revitalization of Southern Food and the other, the American Southern Food Institute?

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SC: I don't—neither of those rings a bell.

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AM: Okay.

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SC: This had a lot of chefs involved. It seems like it was the Southern Food Alliance or something like that. That doesn't—anyhow.

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AM: Well so do you—you thought it would be great to have a Southern food group?

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SC: Oh yes, absolutely.

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AM: So what was the next step for you—

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SC: Absolutely.

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AM: —to become involved?

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SC: Well about that time Nathalie had gone over and met with John T. Edge and came back to Atlanta and said, “I think this is good, gang; let’s join.” So that was all I needed. I was ready to go.

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AM: That’s great. Did you go to the organizational meeting in Birmingham in the summer of 1998, and if so, what do you recall about it?

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SC: I did not go to that meeting. Nathalie went there and—and she came back from Birmingham and—and told all of us here in Atlanta about it.

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AM: That's great. What was your vision for Southern Foodways Alliance when it began?

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SC: Um, well I think—I think the whole—the whole Southern tradition that we have a rich, rich heritage and why we're doing an oral history—. My grandmother used to put me to bed every night with this story: “*‘Twas a cold dark night in the land of Nod, and a band of robbers seated themselves about the campfire. The leader of the band said ‘Horace my boy, tell us a thrilling anecdote.’ Horace pulled a log up by the fire and began. ‘Twas a cold dark night in the land of Nod and a band of robbers....’*” **[Laughs]**

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AM: That's great.

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SC: And there's so much about that that's fascinating like the word *anecdote* jumps out at you but some very large words were—were common usage in the South like I had an uncle who said, “*he commenced to do this.*” And I don't know—this is our Old English heritage or exactly what, and the Land of Nod is East of Eden, so that would be where a band of robbers would gather.

[Laughs]

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AM: That's great.

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SC: So you know we just have so many things—food and culture and—that should be kept alive for our children.

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AM: Has your vision for what this organization could be evolved or has it changed in any way that you've noticed?

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SC: I unfortunately have not been able to attend the last two or three meetings. I was at every early, early convention. And one of my great contributions has been the people that I have drug in [*Laughs*]. I made the chef in Philadelphia who is very knowledgeable and a great researcher, Fritz Blanc, I made him join and he prepared a Philadelphia, I forget what he calls it—in competition with Leah Chase's gumbo. He did a pepper pot I guess, a gumbo type from Philadelphia and he has been an avid participant. So, some of the people that I have brought in have been able to be more active recently than I have. I'm overdue with a baking book [*Laughs*] and I'm grounded and I'm going—you know I have cabin fever fiercely; I'm just going crazy.

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AM: Well good. Once it's done we'll celebrate at a Southern Foodways symposium.

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SC: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. I may be able to participate in the upcoming on eggs and sugar. Nathalie had suggested that meringues, Southern meringues are fantastic and I really can do a good program on meringues, so—.

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AM: So did you attend the first symposium that was in 1998 and if so, what do you recall about it?

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SC: Now was this the one in Memphis at the Peabody Hotel?

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AM: I believe so; it would have been the first one.

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SC: Yeah, I—I think so. Yes, yes; John Edge and had a biscuit competition. He made his grandmother's beaten biscuits and I made my grandmother's Southern light as a feather biscuits and so we had the great biscuit bake-off. My biscuits would beat his in a flash 'cause his are nothing but hardtack. But when he put a sliver of his country ham in there's nobody who can hold a candle to him. *[Laughs]*

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AM: That's great; that's great. Tell us about your role in developing the Southern Foodways Alliance mission and vision and programming.

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SC: Uh, as I say, I was—I participated in the program once or twice. And actually I—I haven't—I didn't—you know I would make suggestions but I did not serve on committees or actually do much on the way of programming.

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AM: Okay.

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SC: I do—I do have—I don't know whether it's in a book cook-wise, but I have done radio programs and all on different Southern dishes and I've written articles for the *Los Angeles Times* syndicate on my mother's gravy. See, she makes the best turkey gravy [*Laughs*] imaginable and her secret weapon is to throw in a cup of the dressing, the stuffing. She saves it out raw and then throws it in the gravy. Now see, this adds onion and celery and wonderful flavors and the bread you know part just totally disintegrates so you—

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AM: And acts as a thickener right?

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SC: It acts as a thickener and you would never ever know that—that was in it, but it just makes the most marvelous turkey gravy, so anyhow. And her—her Southern fried—fried squash, which is yellow crookneck summer squash and cooked, and I had always done it like—you know I thought she did. I cooked them very soft and drained them well. And I sautéed lots of onions in bacon drippings with you know a strip or two of bacon until they were very, very soft and stirred them together. But mine wasn't ever quite like hers. And what I found out just before she kind of lost it was that she took a potato masher and **[Laughs]** not only did she drain the squash really well, then she put them back in the pan and mashed them with a potato masher before she stirred the onions and bacon in.

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AM: Wow.

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SC: So it made all the difference in the world. Suddenly mine became like hers and you know my children oh, these are nanny's squash you know.

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AM: So it's nice to say that—that you spreading the Southern food traditions across the country and really through your writing and speaking is—

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SC: Yeah, I've been able to—

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AM: That's a huge role.

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SC: —with having the—the—you know the pulpit of the—the *LA Times* syndicate articles that go to different—fifty to seventy newspapers around the country.

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AM: Wow, absolutely important. The Southern Foodways Alliance focuses upon food as culture. What does that mean to you both intellectually and personally?

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SC: Well, I—it—see, this has a great meaning to me because of the flour situation. See, the South is noted for its piecrust, biscuits, and cakes. And this is because we had soft winter wheat in the South before there was national—good national distribution of wheat. And the North was noted for its yeast breads and things like that. And that wasn't by accident; it was because of our availability of—of products at that time.

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So our cuisine was totally influenced by available products.

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AM: Right; do you have ideas for the future of the organization or any projects that you would like to see happen or topics that you'd like to study?

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SC: Right off the cuff I can't think of any but I'm sure you know with a bit of standing I could.

[Laughs]

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AM: Okay; I want to ask a few questions about you personally, so we can get a history about who you are and where you come from. So if you wouldn't mind stating your date and place of birth.

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SC: Atlanta, Georgia, right here in—I'm one of the few Atlantians who is a native **[Laughs]**. As my husband says, she has a ring in her nose; you can tell. Anyhow I was born at Old Piedmont Hospital February 23rd, the day after George Washington and my father's birthday—1935. And I—I had the great advantage of spending a considerable amount of my early childhood with my grandmother in Conyers, Georgia and she lived on Main Street just a block from downtown, but this was truly in the country in those days. And we had two cows and always five or six pigs, big chicken yard, and an acre garden, which—all of which my grandmother maintained herself except for milking the cows, which my grandfather did. He did the pigs and the cows.

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But she took care of the garden and the chickens; that was her domain.

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AM: And I'm sure you learned some of that craft as well while you were there with her.

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SC: Oh yeah, she raised baby chicks and she had you know a light bulb to keep them warm. She kept them in the basement in a stand-up screened wire chicken you know run so to speak and she had a little area with a light bulb in the back and they had a little floppy cloth so they could go back and forth into the open, the larger open air run that was not enclosed and warm, but then at night they could all snuggle up together and the light bulb.

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And I have vivid memories of the chicken feed.

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You see I guess my cooking and culinary instincts were already moving at that time, and my little playmate across the street Reed Rue, we were going to be married and his maid had already—we had already gotten the stove, the wood stove when they got an electric stove, we got the old wooden stove. It was ours to set up house with; they had promised us it was ours—that they would keep it right there and not let anything happen to it. So we were thrilled over that.

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But anyhow Reed and I were making mud pies and we would frequently put just a little bit of chicken feed in the mud pies. Now my grandmother, she never-ever spanked me. She—I was her first grandchild and she just spoiled me rotten. She'd let me make frog houses in the walk, in the sandy walk with a sterling silver spoon [*Laughs*], you know. I'm out there piling sand on my seat and pulling them out. And she'd let me make the whole front walk full of frog houses. But at sundown I had to take the stick broom and—and brush them all down again which I would do every night.

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But anyhow I just—I felt like you know that sometimes mud pies just needed a little—. Well my grandmother sat Reed and I both down and she said, “Now you all must not play in my

chicken feed. That's really expensive. And I really have to have all my chicken feed. Now you two—just no more playing in the chicken feed.” So we said, “Okay.” And things went well for a long time, but we had one batch that just really needed a little bit of chicken feed. So we put a little in and I don't know. Several weeks later my grandmother sat the two of us down on the back steps and she said—held up two shiny pennies. She said, “Now I was going to give these to you to go uptown to get candy,” as she you know frequently did. “But you've disobeyed me so I'm not able to give you these pennies today. I told you not to use any chicken feed and you did.” And Reed and I—we looked at each other. We knew we would never tell. We could trust each other with our lives. How on earth did she know?

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Well now, there were our mud pies on the back of the broiler coop in the sun to dry. And they had grass sprouting out of them. *[Laughs]* All these grains had just—beautiful but that never occurred to us of course. *[Laughs]*

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AM: That's incredible. So on that same subject, please tell us about some of the food of your childhood; who prepared it and what were some typical meals and maybe what was some of the ceremony that surrounded those meals.

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SC: Okay; my grandmother prepared incredible meals. She made biscuits three times a day and cornbread twice a day. And all my uncles came home for lunch. This is a little Southern town and one uncle was the mail carrier and another uncle worked at the grocery store and they both came home and my grandfather was a carpenter, but all the men came home for lunch every day.

And of course this is when they'd all—my uncle from the grocery store would have all the gossip from there that the ladies helping in the grocery store had told him or he delivered—they delivered groceries and he would tell everything he had heard all morning. So this is how gossip got spread around the little town at noon every day when men who had been out—all over town [*Laughs*] would come home with—with every—everything that was happening, everything going on.

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And she would usually have two meats like fried chicken and ham and would always have sliced cucumbers and onions in vinegar with pepper and always you know any time that tomatoes were in season, a plate of sliced tomatoes, and she would have two or three vegetables in addition you know that she had put up, canned in jars from the garden in the summer time. So we may have peas, lima beans, and green beans, you know different—different vegetables from the garden.

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And everybody would you know come to the table at once. She'd call you know, "*Dinner,*" and every—everybody would come running so to speak. And my uncles would have washed up and sometimes they'd just come in and sit down at the table 'cause they knew she'd have everything on in minutes. And we'd all gather and eat meals that way.

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AM: That's great. When did you first cultivate an interest in food and what or who do you think was the catalyst?

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SC: Well I'm sure my grandmother was. I used to follow her around the kitchen and I would try to make her biscuits. And I would use her bowls, her flour, her shortening. And see I've watched her shape those biscuits [*Laughs*] so I thought that the—the dough was dry enough to shape. And you know I would do everything just like she did. I'd check—I used to wrap it like she did.

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AM: So she didn't roll them out and cut them, she shaped them?

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SC: She shaped them; right, right, but mine were always this dry mealy mess. And she—I cried and I'd say, “Nanny what did I do wrong? You know I used everything you did. I did it just like you did.” And she was always terribly busy because see, she had to tend the garden, the chickens, and get these meals—huge meals for all these men on the table. And she would lean down and give me a big hug and she'd say, “Honey; I guess you forgot to add a touch of grace.”

[*Laughs*]

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Now what I was doing that—what she was doing that I was missing—see, she had a big oblong wooden bread bowl and she had this gooey mess in the back of the bread bowl, a dough, gooey dough, and she would wipe her hands and get her hand full of flour and flour her hands good. And then she'd take a handful of flour and sprinkle it on this wet dough. And then she would pick up a piece and dip it in the flour and coat it with the flour to coat the outside. See, it was too gooey to shape unless you floured the outside of it. But she did this very rapidly. She'd grab some and put it in the flour and roll it around. And what I thought she was shaping you know rolling it around on the palm and with her thumb and finger, what she was really doing

was just shaking off the excess flour. But she had a very soft wet dough, very, very soft; it looks like cottage cheese when you get it just right—not soup but cottage cheese. And see it's all this liquid that makes steam in the oven that makes her biscuits so incredibly light and moist.

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And I finally realized this when I was in England taking cooking classes at Leiths School of Food and Wine—boy, I really struggled there—I'm not good at following directions. You know I always want to try it my way. And—and I had just been in trouble all the time at Leiths. They carried the instructors—the ladies would carry a spoon in their pocket up here and they'd whip out that tasting spoon and slam it on the table [*Laughs*] at you. And I—I finally survived with the savarin. See, I knew that savarin had a lot of eggs and it was going to stick like crazy—this savarin ring. And I was without my trusty Pam of course in the UK. So I resorted to my friend Chris Jean Ligroin's [?] technique for sticky things. I buttered the savarin mold well and then—or maybe—maybe we had shortening, I can't remember, but anyhow greased it well and I stuck it out in the icy London air out the window and for a few minutes and got it solid. And then I oiled it. And when we took the savarins out everybody's stuck and tore up and was a mess and mine just fell out at perfection. Oh I just loved it; I loved it. And then I got real prestige with that. They would come around and say well, let's go see what the American is up to. [*Laughs*] But anyhow—shoot, I forgot where I was.

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AM: Well we were just talking about how your—your food history and who—who helped and your grandmother was the one.

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SC: Yeah; the biscuits, right and she—she would cook hers in a little eight or nine-inch pan and she would squish them up against each other—technical term *squish* so that they would rise up instead of spreading out.

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AM: How did you get your first job working, writing, or dealing with food?

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SC: Oh okay; let's see. I think my first job was demonstrating Cuisinarts in department stores. I think that was my first time. I may have done something earlier. I can't quite remember. But that's the first one that sort of kept going on into more and more and more things to do.

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AM: And did you go to culinary school before all of that or after?

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SC: No, no, no. Actually [*Laughs*] I had been cooking for eleven years for the boys' school. My former husband and I started a boys' school, Brandon Hall. It's still going here in Atlanta out on the river. And I had started with two boys. And Art Hoff [?] and Jim Yelvington [?] and we—at the school the philosophy there—there were a facility of other—to assist other private schools, not a competitor for—and—and it was all individual instruction because see, a student can easily cover three years one with individual instruction. You can just move rapidly.

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And if you have an instructor who is an expert in their field and they're excited about their area like someone who is excited about history this excitement is contagious especially on a one-to-one basis. So it was very, very successful method of teaching high school students. So we had—were designed to have teenage boys. We eventually by the end of that first year had thirty boys, but the first two boys before we had—trying to get started you know, I think both of them had been kicked out of not only every private school in the US but a few overseas you know.

[Laughs]

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AM: And what year did you start that school?

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SC: I'd say this is fifty-nine and they were wonderful, Art and Jim. I—I **[Laughs]**—we were in this big stone castle on the bluffs of the Chattahoochee and the first big ice storm—. See, an ice storm, we were on wells and electric pumps so that meant you were out of water. So you know when an ice storm was predicted we knew to get water. I had some clean plastic garbage, small garbage pails that I had just for the purpose of storing water **[Laughs]** you know. So we had stored some water but still water was going to be precious because we didn't know how long we were going to be isolated up there. And we were I think about seven days, yeah.

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I—we cooked and we'd eat off of plates but we wouldn't dare use water to wash dishes. We had to—you know 'cause we didn't know so we had this huge stack of dishes stacking up and **[Laughs]** in the sink. And I had asked Jim to build me a fire to warm the baby bottles. And I had two tiny babies, twins, who had been premature and the doctor had said you know if they—

they caught a cold they could die. So I was just panicked about them. And the best we could do—all the fireplaces were blocked. This place had huge fireplaces in the main hall. There were two enormous fireplaces, but we couldn't use—this was just shortly after we moved in, and we couldn't use either one because they were still blocked.

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So we found an old kerosene heater and some kerosene down in the stable. And we brought it up and we brought mattresses, just the three of us. See, my husband was at a conference in New York and couldn't get in because of the ice and snow—couldn't get back in. So the two boys and the two babies and I [*Laughs*] were freezing to death but we pulled mattresses in the tiniest room we could find in the place, which was a little tiny alcove room off of the office and we'd run the kerosene heater in there and try to get it as warm as possible. And when it started smelling too bad I'd turn it off for fear we'd kill ourselves with the exhaust. So anyhow, and the boys slept with the babies on their chest to keep them warm.

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AM: Oh that's sweet.

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SC: But when I'd asked Jim to build me a fire to warm the baby bottle, he just love it and of course he'd build this huge raging bonfire.

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AM: So you really started cooking for them?

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SC: Yeah. Yeah, uh-huh, so I had—I did all the cooking for a considerable time. And at the—oh, I didn't know how to cook you know. And it was just a nightmare at times.

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AM: Oh I can't imagine.

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SC: The scrambled eggs, I would scramble a dozen eggs for these two boys and they'd say but see they'd all stick to the pan. I had this huge pan. This was back before the days of non-stick pans and—and I would scrape like crazy but they'd end up just this little you know a plateful of knotty stuff because most of them were glued to the bottom of the pan.

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See, and thank heavens my German mother-in-law came to visit and taught me how to scramble eggs. She—see, I was putting a dozen in a cold big pan and putting it on the stove and then standing there frantically scraping as they heated up. Now that liquid protein had gone down in every nook and cranny of the pan and I was literally cooking the eggs into the pan. And she taught me to get that pan hot first and then add a little butter or oil, butter and oil both she used, and then add the eggs and they would cook on this hot surface, not down in the pan.

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So you know that was just slowly bit by bit I learned these things.

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AM: And so eventually what—this is off the script here, but eventually what was the thing that made you want to go to culinary school?

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SC: Well I was divorced and this was when I was—I had taken—I'd entered a grits contest [*Laughs*] and I won second place.

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AM: Where on earth was there a grits contest?

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SC: At—at Rich's and Nathalie Dupree's Riches Cooking School and I won a year supply of grits and the products that Royal made. We had cases of Royal Jell-o, Royal pudding; we didn't—you know I was—we were broke and desperate because I was divorced with three small children. [*Laughs*] So I was—I was thrilled for all of this and grits, grits, grits, grits. But I was a grits princess and anyhow—and part of the prize was some free cooking lessons. And Nathalie learned that she could come to me with my questions because of my chemistry background. See, I was a Research Bio Chemist for the Vanderbilt Medical School. So she'd say, "Shirley why does this or this or this happen?" And a lot of times I would know from the chemistry. I had started—after class was over I'd go up and explain to Nathalie what had gone wrong when something had gone wrong.

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I'd say, "Nathalie those eggs were coagulated in the beginning. You should have just thrown it away and started over you know." [*Laughs*] So anyhow—

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AM: So that piqued your interest in food and—?

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SC: Yeah; and then Nathalie would say, “Why do we worry about our, you know raw eggs in mayonnaise, but you don’t worry about raw eggs in a chocolate mousse?” And see, I knew how to do research. I didn’t know all this stuff, but I knew to pick up the phone and call somebody.

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AM: And now everybody picks up the phone and calls you.

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SC: [*Laughs*] So I would—I would you know with anything like that, any of the microbe things I would call Dr. Frank Brown at the CDC. He had written all the early food-borne disease literature for the CDC and he was just wonderful. And we had him out to speak a number of times and he was such a hoot. We would take things out of the oven, you know while he was talking and leave them out there on the counter and then he’d get to his part about not leaving food out of the refrigerator. And he’d say like, “All those things you took out two hours ago,” [*Laughs*], “they should have been refrigerated right away, you know.”

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And he explained to us that one of the great dangers that people never realized with the barbeque—that people would pre-cook say barbeque chicken halves or quarters and then keep them at room temperature for several hours and then put them on the grill them and slap

barbeque sauce on them. But for a crowd they would do that to speed it up ‘cause you know you’d never get them done just cooking on the grill. So they would be pre-cooked and stand for a long time and sometimes three or four hours at room temperature.

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And it could be very difficult to trace the food-borne disease; you know people would get sick. But the people who got the chicken on the center and the chicken got hot enough to kill everything that had grown on it, they were fine. They didn't get sick. But the people who had got the chicken out on the edge that didn't get hot might be deathly ill with food-borne diseases.

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AM: So these people in this—this kind of—these questions you would answer for folks, that made you start thinking I need to mix the two and make a career out of it, is that right?

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SC: No, not really. [*Laughs*] Marilyn Sullivan over on—even you interviewed, she was running a bakery then and she’d call me with bakery questions. And I would know or I could call somebody who would know you know from the chemistry. And so Marilyn said to Nathalie and I was working at the Rich’s Cooking School; Nathalie was always calling me with questions and she called one time. I was in tears. And she said, “What’s wrong?” And I said, “Well, I’m not going to make it through the summer financially.” She said, “Well, you know you can work for me here. It’s minimum wage,” which was, I don’t know—something like three dollars an hour. And I said, “Great.” So I worked there and we—the kids and I had a huge paper route which nearly killed us, and anyhow to get through the—the summer.

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But while I was working at the Cooking School, Marilyn called Nathalie and said, “Nathalie why don’t you get Shirley to teach a class and teach us all this science mess at once, you know food science in everyday language because she can explain it so anybody can understand it?” And she said, “My phone bill to her last month was \$150 just calling her with questions. So it would be a whole lot cheaper for me to come over and take lessons? So Nathalie says, “Well, why don’t we try it? Let’s run it.” And you know she ran different things on her schedule. And Nathalie was a hoot. She would not have the French chefs in. She would only have American chefs into the Riches Cooking School, so she had Paul Prudhomme and she had Jane—oh, I forgot—Freeman or something like that who used to write books, and she had American chefs from all over.

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So she said, “Why don’t we just put it on the calendar and see if we get people?” And I said, “Okay.” So my mother and I [*Laughs*]—I fixed you know—worded a flyer and Xerox(ed) it about the class and Nathalie—and we folded them over and stapled them and addressed them to everybody who came to the Cooking School and put stamps on them and got them out. And the class filled up. And it—in fact, we had full classes every time we ran it.

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AM: Wow.

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SC: And meanwhile I was demonstrating everything under the sun. They’d come into the Cooking School saying, “Can somebody demonstrate at Neiman Marcus Saturday?” And I was

desperate for money so it was always yes, yes, you know. And I turned out to be a pretty good omelet maker after 200 a day. **[Laughs]**

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But one thing led to another and then I started teaching for Truffle's Traveling Cooking School. And this was the Cuisinart distributor had this idea to go into department stores and give classes and then the ladies would buy the Cuisinarts. And so this was the class that used every blade of the Cuisinart. You know you used the grater, you used the slicer, you used the steel knife and doing different things. So and to cut expenses, they wouldn't let you go in the night before so you had to go in at nine o'clock in the morning and to a strange city, and there was supposed to be someone from the department store to meet you at the airport. And of course there was no one. And you'd call all your numbers. "I thought somebody from advertising who was going to get you," you know.

00:39:59

Finally you would be walking into the store as the ladies who were taking the class would walk in and they had been sent detailed, I mean every single ingredient down to salt and pepper, and every pan and every spatula. They would have nothing. So as you were walking through the department you'd have to grab pans. And you'd rush to this conference room with two card tables set up and you've got the Cuisinart on the card tables and you've got one of these little Farberware ovens in the back. And you have to find out where the fuse box is because you can't run the oven and the processor at the same time without blowing the fuse. So the first thing to do is find out where the fuse box is. **[Laughs]** And then you go through this and say your—they give you an assistant and you say, "Now Miss Smith is going to peel apples for our next dish while we do this." **[Laughs]** And you'd keep your assistant prepping for you. And this was stuff that was all supposed to have been done and ready for you, you know. And you'd learn to live by

the skin of your teeth. And you'd do this class twice, once at ten in the morning and once later in the afternoon. And it was a killer; it was just a killer.

00:41:22

AM: So really teaching was your entre into food as a profession?

00:41:26

SC: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:41:30

AM: Okay; well my next question will be regarding Southern food in particular. How do you think that Southern food has evolved over the course of your lifetime?

00:41:40

SC: Oh my. Well part of it is availability; we have everything under the sun available now and exposure to other cuisines. See, my uncle, this little country boy in Conyers, Georgia, he would probably never have left Georgia—he may never have left Georgia, period you know. He had a printing press in the basement and he made chevrons for the CCC and—and printed up flyers and was the postman too. And—and anyhow, he—he would just—would never have left Georgia. But he was in the Black Forest and he was in the Battle of the Bulge. You know World War II was a major food influence on—on the US and especially small towns in the South because of these boys who would never have eaten anything but biscuits and were over there eating croissants and their exposure and the fact that they brought back a lot of this—and it's amazing near any Army Base now you will find incredible food, because they'll ask the store to stock so

and so which they had—had in Germany or Japan. And you have just amazing resources in—in towns that have Army Bases. Even though it's a small town they'll have fabulous food supplies.

00:43:31

AM: That's interesting. How has—I'm sorry; much talk about Southern food is talk of continuity of tradition. In this age is such talk merely romantic or do you think it's accurate?

00:43:49

SC: Well it's—it's really hard to you know—my daughters say they were thrilled when I got the squash the way my mother had it, nanny's you know—they had squash just like their—their grandmother. But I don't know that my granddaughter, she loves, Lord she loves food, period and she can eat more meat than a man and she's only seven years old. But I don't know that she gets enough exposure. We still—we go to a lot of places that are—are Southern food like Colonnade that they do prepare vegetables in a Southern manner. So I say my granddaughter is getting exposed to them by you know eating out some. And my daughter cooks a little more, like she does salmon a lot, which you know my grandmother would never have had.

00:45:06

So but at least my granddaughter gets exposed to some Southern food.

00:45:11

AM: Right. And then we have one—one more question for you. If you could, please describe a meal that you would characterize as totemic(ally) Southern.

00:45:21

SC: Oh lands, well you have to have biscuits and cornbread, definitely start and cobbler for dessert and you know depending upon what fruit—peaches or blueberries or blackberries—whatever is available—in season, and now sliced tomatoes, the—the cucumbers and onions in vinegar, and then fried chicken, ham or sausage in some form. And see my grandmother would have both at—at one meal; she would have say pork chops and fried chicken and gravy—always gravy. And then several vegetables; it would be like creamed corn and lima beans and let’s see what else; fried okra or boiled okra or both. And I guess those would be you know some of the major typical—or at least meals of my youth.

00:46:54

AM: That’s great. Well Shirley I want to thank you for taking the time to do this. Again, we are with Shirley Corriher sitting in a beautiful room at the Cherokee Town Club on West Paces Ferry Road in Atlanta, Georgia, and it is Saturday, February 5, 2005. And this is Angie Mosier for the Southern Foodways Alliance.

00:47:15

SC: And we’re going to have a nice salad or who knows—even salmon or a hamburger.

[Laughs]

00:47:23

AM: Maybe some cornbread.

00:47:24

SC: Yeah. Yeah, we’re headed—headed for lunch across the way. **[Laughs]**

00:47:29

AM: Thank you again, Shirley.

00:47:32

[End Shirley Corriher Interview]