“Tee Eva” Perry
Tee Eva’s Pies and Pralines – New Orleans, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It’s Friday, July 8, 2011. I’m in New Orleans, Louisiana at Tee Eva’s, and I’m with the proprietor. If I could ask you—could you please tell me your name, your full name, and what your occupation is—what you do for a living?

Tee Eva: My name is Eva Perry. I’m now retired. [Laughs] So I don’t do very much anymore. I kind of do some neighborhood community work and stuff like that you know, and work at my church and help different members and friends. But I mainly help my granddaughter. She’s got—she’s the owner of Tee Eva’s Praline and Pies here at 5201 Magazine Street. So now I, in turn, help my granddaughter because I gave her the business, I guess about seven or eight years ago, yeah. So this is what I’m doing now.

SR: Could I ask you for your birth date?
TE: September 12, 1934.

SR: Okay. So you’re retired, but I’ve seen you in here many times, and it sounds like you keep very active.

TE: Well I’m a helper to my granddaughter. You know if I’m going to help anybody I’m going to help my granddaughter. You know what I'm saying? It’s—they always taught me to keep it in the family, so I don’t deal out anywhere(s) to work, you know. So I--I help her.

SR: What is your granddaughter’s name?

TE: Her name is Keonna Thornton Sykes, yeah.
SR: How old is she?

TE: She’s 35.

SR: Well I’m curious—this is kind of getting ahead of myself—but did she always know that she wanted to take over your place?

TE: Well I don’t think she knew that she wanted to take it over. Oh when she was a little girl—it’s just the idea that I always sit down and talk to my grandkids. I said if ever I would get a business going it would be a family business and I would like one of the kids when they grow up to be the head of the business.

So Keonna, she’s the oldest one of the--of the grandchildren. I have three. And she decided that she would take over the business when her grandmother retired. So she—they all—hung around in the kitchen with me a great deal in the evenings after school—. Not very much because, you know, they had homework to get and they belonged to different--did different activities in the school while they
were in school. And their mom and dad kept their feet close to the fire, which is meaning that you have to do homework when you come home from school. You have to get a certain amount of rest.

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SR: When you opened up you—when you first opened up your business, what year was that?

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TE: When the business started? I think it was around about 19—probably was 1990 I got started with my business doing my pralines and pies, and there was a--a little shop on Freret Street, at 4711 Freret. I think it’s a bike shop there now, and I haven't gotten over there to see it but I want to go and see what it looks like with bikes inside of there. When I was doing gourmet dishes there, I used to work seven days a week and seat about like 16 people. It was a sit-down restaurant. It was fabulous, a little place; it was cozy. You could seat 16 people and I would go in very early morning and I would get my lunch ready for noon. Started at 11:00 [a.m.], I think; 11:00 until 2:00 was lunch, and then I would serve dinner from 5:00 until 9:00 in the evening. And then about 9:30 I would start making pralines and baking pies for the next day.

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I used to work from 7:00 in the morning until about 2 o'clock the next morning when I had my little food service restaurant, Tee Eva’s Praline and Pies. And you know what I served? I--I don’t have a menu; I have a menu but I don’t have it out right now, but my menu was entitled of red beans and beef stew on Mondays. On Tuesdays I think I had—on Tuesdays I think it was meatballs and spaghetti. On a Wednesday I had stuffed cabbage rolls with potatoes and carrots and cornbread. On Thursdays—Thursdays was baked chicken--with baked chicken. I might have it a little bit turned around because it’s been some years now because I started over there around 1990—I think between ’90 and ’92 I was over there. But—and on a Friday, it was a la carte on Fridays. Fridays was—Saturday was a la carte; Fridays was fish, chicken, stuffed bell pepper, and maybe two vegetables on the side, or whatever vegetables I might have thought of to make.

But I did fresh-cooked food daily; each day I had food cooked at my place. And on a Sunday I had the buffet from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. and I would have something like roasted duck [Laughs]—you look like you’re surprised. Roasted duck; I would have maybe stuffed flounder. Those were the kinds of dishes I did and I would have sautéed eggplant with shrimp; probably if the mirlitons were out then I would have mirlitons with ham. I would make green beans and onion rings; you know just a great menu for a Sunday brunch. And I had people come from the
four corners of New Orleans. I mean to sit down and have food with me, you know. I had a great lunch crowd.

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And my place got vandalized and they took—they took the door off of—off of my little shop and they took all my pies and pralines and they took the TV. They didn't take any money. So then I—I gave the shop up because I had got so comfortable there and I thought it was just a very good place to do a good business for the community, you know growing up here in New Orleans from a child and something I always wanted to do—working in a lot of different restaurants around New Orleans, in the Quarters, and I was just stunned when they vandalized my place. And I had to look for somewhere else to do a business after that.

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SR: You opened it in the--in the ‘90s or in the ‘80s?

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TE: I think it could have been maybe the last part of—I think it could have been like ’91—’90 or ’91.

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SR: You were working every day.

TE: Yes, I was. I was. You know I think I applied for my license like at that time, around about 1989 or something like that but yeah, I worked every day. I worked seven days a week because it was something—it was a dream that I had and it had to be fulfilled. And to fulfill this dream I had to work. And I didn't have money from sources or anything like that, so I had to work and earn the money each day. The money I earned today, I would go and shop with it when I closed up. I would take out two hours or two-and-a-half hours and go shopping for the next day and I would go back into my shop and put my groceries up and--and start getting my menu ready for the next day. So you know, I had to work.

So all--all of my time, it was dedicated to my little business; as you hear me say, my “little” business, because I’m petite. So and my--my little shop, it was a little shop. It was a petite shop. So it was a little business; you know it was a business that I could handle because I can cook two or three meals and later on in the morning and in the afternoon I can put all my food away if there was any left—hardly never none left after lunchtime. And then I could get there and work with my pies and my pralines.
And I had great company, which was students from Tulane University and from Loyola. They would come in at night, in the evenings after school, and they would study. They would sit around on the floor and study and they would have coffee and tea with praline and pies while they are studying. And I thought that was the most amazing thing that could ever happen. So that’s why I could stay late at my place. You know the [restaurant], it would be locked up. It wouldn’t be opened to the public. I would lock up and they would sit around. The kids would sit around on the floor and do their lessons, and I enjoyed that so much. And those young men and young women, they became my children. They--they were my nieces and my nephews you know. They became my sons and daughters. Some of them called me Mom. Some of them called me Aunt Tee, you know whatever--whichever they wanted to call me was fine. But they were right there and they would say, “What you need me to do” when one finished their lessons or something. They’d say, they’d come into the kitchen and wash up their hands and say “What you need me to do? I’m going to help you to do what you need done.”

And believe it or not, when there’s something going on here big in the city it would be so nice. You know what they would do? They’d call me up and say, “Tee Eva? Are you busy?” And I might say, “No.” And then they said, “Well, there’s a
party going on at so-and-so’s house or apartment,” or something like that, “and we want to take you over to the party with us.” Then these kids, they started taking me out with them, and that was so neat, because I never went out nowhere(s). I couldn’t tell you at—in the daytime I could tell you what went on in the Quarters because there were times when I worked down there. But at nighttime I couldn’t tell you [Laughs] what went on. And they started taking me out with them you know. And I just thought it was so nice [that] they thought so much of me, you know. They really cared.

And they became a family to me and I truly enjoyed it. And do you know up until today, there’s some of them that still come around. They live out of town. They’re married; have kids now—wife and children—and they will come and visit with me and bring the family to meet me, and I just love that so much. I’m like still a part of their life, which is great. I’ve had a beautiful time when operating my business from the beginning up until even now. It--it has been truly wonderful and I truly enjoy it. There’s so many amazing things that’s happened with Tee Eva’s Praline and Pies. I mean there have been kids; they’ll come in and they want to make sno-balls. Well you know I had these sno-balls only since I’ve been on Magazine Street. I didn't have sno-balls when I was on Freret Street. But when I moved to Magazine Street, that’s when the sno-balls arrived because I was at
Fannie’s Sno-Ball’s at 4430 Magazine, and Fannie had been there for oh, God, how many years? Her son, he grew up there; it’s her nephew, or her brother’s child I think, but he grew up there and this lady, she’s had the sno-ball place for 70-some years [Phone Rings]—4430 Magazine.

SR: Is it still there?

TE: It’s still there, but—the building is still there, but—.

SR: Oh okay. Do you need to get that?

TE: Where that phone at?

SR: Here it is. [Phone Rings]
TE: The building is still there.

SR: I’ll pause this.

TE: But somebody else has it now. It’s something else. It’s a restaurant there now. But the machine was there. The sno-ball machine was already there when I moved there, so I just started buying flavors and started calling the ice man, and the same ice man had been delivering ice there. He still delivers ice here to me and he had been delivering ice there for 50-some years.

SR: Who is that?

TE: Would you believe that—Duplantier, yeah. He’s been—he started when he was a boy with his daddy. And his dad passed away and he took over the business
and now his sons work with him in the business. But it’s been more than—well

I’ve been selling a sno-ball I think about 17 years now, so—.

SR: Well do you know what year it was that you got vandalized?

TE: Let me see; 1990—’91; like 1992.

SR: Oh okay.

TE: It could have been 1992 that this happened.

SR: Did they ever catch the vandals?
**TE:** Yeah, they lived right upstairs over--over the shop. Wasn’t that something? They lived right upstairs, some kids that lived upstairs over the shop and they would come in every day and buy lunch and they would—“Hi, Miss Tee. How are you?” And they were coming home and great conversations, and they were such, I guess wonderful kids, I thought, that lived right upstairs over me you know. And that’s where the policemen found the pies and the pralines and the television—right upstairs. *[Laughs]* And they took the—it was something. They took the door. This door was a huge door with big, big, big, big glass. So it took them some time to get this door down, you know, but they did. They got it off the hinge. The door was lying flat on the floor in the doorway, inside the doorway flat on the floor.

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The door—the glass was so thick on the door so the glass didn't even break.

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**SR:** And so then you moved pretty quickly to Magazine Street?

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**TE:** It wasn’t very long. I kind of had to look for some places of where I could find—where would I find another little place as cute as that little place was. You know I tried. But it didn't happen, so it could have been from, I think around ’95 —
'95, I think I found Fannie’s place. I had gone to bed that night and I was lying down reading the want ads, where you look for businesses at—you know in that part of the paper, the *Times-Picayune*—and I happened to come across this little small ad, very tiny, but it showed up in big letters to me. I saw it in big letters. It was tiny, tiny in the *Times-Picayune* and it said *sno-ball shop for rent*, 4430 Magazine. I think I still have that little piece of paper somewhere(s). And I’m like a packrat you know; I don’t throw nothing away. Every--everything means so much to me because this is accomplishments to me, you know what I’m saying? A single woman, and I was--I was in age when I started this business, so it wasn’t like I was 20 or 30-years-old when I started this business, you see. I was over 50 but I had to maintain you know *[Laughs]*. You can look at me and see I maintain.

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And I called the number, 12-midnight; I called the number. I wanted the place. I really wanted the place. So the gentleman answered the phone and I said, “I’m calling about the place for rent.” And he says to me, “It’s a sno-ball stand,” he says, “And you can come tomorrow evening at 4 o’clock when I get in from work and I’ll show you the place.” He said, “I’m painting it right now.” And I told him what my name was. And he says, “Okay, I’ll see you then.” I didn't even ask him what his name was. I was just wanting the place.

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So I went down that evening and I got to meet him. His name was Michael Laumenn, and he opened the door and he showed me the place and he was painting it and it was a bright—a bright, real light, real light yellow. It could—like a baby yellow, something a baby—a yellow a baby would wear; not a hard-color yellow. It was very light. It’s soft.

So he said, “You want to change it?” And I said, “No.” And I asked him, I said, “How much would you rent me the place for?” He says, “Well,” he said, “I guess”—he stuttered a little and then he says, “Well, I would like $400 a month.” I said, “Well, I don’t know if I can afford $400 a month.” That sounded like—well, for me it was a lot you know. And then I was going to have to pay my own light bill and I got to pay my telephone bill. And the place where I was, the restaurant where I was on Freret Street, was $250 a month.

So it was—I rented that place from Mr. Korese. He had businesses down—Frank Korese—he had that business over there, that big building on Freret. And I met Mr. Korese through the Pancake—it was a gentleman who owned a pancake business on Canal Street. I’m trying to think of the name of it.
SR: Betsy’s?

TE: No, ma'am; it wasn’t Betsy. It was the other pancake—it’s another pancake building. It’s on that side of the street, on—it’s going toward the lake, but it’s like a block. So they’re like diagonal of each other, the pancake place, Betsy’s and then the other pancake place. Well that gentleman, he told me that he and Mr. Korese were great friends. He says, “And I’m going to give him your telephone number and have him to call you.” And he did and that’s how I got the place on Freret Street.

So when I met Michael and I told him where the place was and how much it cost me there, he says, “Well, okay,” he said, “You know what?” He said, “I’m going to try to help you as much as I can,” he said, “But you know it—that’s what it rents for. It’s $400.” I said, “Well, when I start making some money I’ll pay you $400 a month.” So he says, “Well, I’ll tell you what,” he said, “I’m going to rent it to you for $300 a month.” So he said, “Can you pay $300?” And I told him, I said, “I’m sure I can.” I said, “I think my food is—it’s worth enough to pay $300 a month.” So okay, we got that and we worked in the place. And Michael and I, he worked when he got off from work and I worked during the daytime, and I worked...
you know cleaning the place up and buying a stove and putting in the place because his mom, she sold sno-balls only four months out of the year, so which was the summer months. She didn't work in the wintertime. But of course she had--she had sno-balls and hamburgers and hotdogs. That is what she sold there.

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So she had a--a grill she made her hotdogs on—I mean her hamburgers on. So we had the grill taken out and we put a stove in, the four-burner stove with an oven, so I could bake my pies you know. It had all the overheads and everything already, so I could bake my pies—you know the vents and stuff—and make my pralines.

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So I kind of made this little place restaurant-style.

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SR: But did it have seats [or] tables in it?

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TE: No, I—
SR: It was just a takeout place, right?

TE: It was just a takeout. It was strictly a sno-ball and hamburgers and it was takeout. So even when I got it, it was still takeout but I could—I fixed it up where I could cook food and you know they--they can pick it up. They would call and pick it up. So then Michael had the driveway there and he kept it very nice and--and neat, his driveway, and he would park his car on the street and he would let me put the chairs in the carport for customers to sit down and--and have lunch. So it—it turned out really nice. Michael was a great landlord.

And I saw Michael the other day at Rouse’s, and I opened my arms and I said, “Give me a big hug and a kiss” [Smiles] because I hadn’t seen him in a long time. But Michael became like my son. When I ran out of whatever I might have needed in the shop and I’m busy working and he’s home, and I could call him up and say, “Michael, could you come run down to Winn Dixie and get this for me or get that for me, please?” And he would come and go get it for me. He was an—he is another child. Well he’s a child; he’s a grown man, but I call him my child you know, and Michael—.
I worked one year over there at 4430 Magazine Street—I think two straight years, I did—I’d work all night baking pies and making pralines the night before Mardi Gras. You know, right there; it was just that comfortable because see the business was right on the front of the house. It was—what do you call it—Grandma and Grandpa clause? It was built from way back because Miss Fannie started this business when Michael was a baby. And it--it should have—it should have been known as—What is it called when you put a plaque? It should have had a plaque on that building.

SR: Like a historic site?

TE: Yeah, because that building was historic, you know.

SR: Did he live there, or did you?
TE: He--he lived there. The house was in the back of the building, uh-huh, and it—the business was on the front, you know.

SR: Tell me: Did you know right away that you wanted to sell sno-balls, or was that a tough decision?

TE: Well no. What happened, when I was on Freret Street and this friend of mine, she said to me—he said—“You know we’re building”—the ideas—he said, “Sno-balls.” We had a space in the dining room where my display window was. And he always wanted to put a sno-ball machine there. And I told him, I said, “I don’t think we could do that.” I said, “I don’t think you could put” —. You know, I said, “Because it’s a restaurant.” And not knowing much about business, you know--.

And so anyway, we always talked about it but we never took it any further. So it was just talking about, you know, maybe you could put a sno-ball machine there.
But this place already had its machine at Fannie’s Sno-Balls when I moved there. So then it wasn’t no thought about it. You know I said, “Okay, I can do sno-balls,” because that’s what it was—a sno-ball place.

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Then what I had to do, I had to convert it into this little restaurant-style. It had—it already had the--the overhead, the vents and all. It had all of that already but I had to get a stove instead of the grill, you see. So we took the grill out and the deep-fryer because I don’t fry food, but I’ll bake food. I don’t eat fried foods. So we took the grill out and we took out the--the deep fryer and we put the stove in. So then it became Tee Eva’s red beans and rice, crawfish pie, jambalaya, filé gumbo, I mean you know it was on. [Laughs] Back making the foods again, but I didn't do my seven-day-a-week menu.

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SR: Right.

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TE: I didn't do that because it was—by the time I got over at 4430 Magazine, it got to be a little much because the pralines had took off and the people had me making pralines for weddings, for parties, for birthdays, to promote their
businesses; they just loved those pralines, you know. And pies, and so you know I just stuck mainly with the pies and the pralines and I just did a small amount of food.

So I--I downsized the food to the crawfish pie, the jambalaya, filé gumbo, and red beans and rice. Excuse me. So that’s what we still have here, the same kinds of food.

SR: Oh you have that here now?

TE: Yes, but we’ll cater a party. If somebody wants a party, it’s on you know like lickety-split [Finger Snaps] [Laughs].

SR: Oh you will?

TE: Oh yeah.
SR: So you’ll make large amounts?

TE: Oh yeah. We do red bean parties, jambalaya parties, gumbo parties, you know.

SR: Now I should say for the record that when we talk about “here,” you’re now in a third location.

TE: Yes.

SR: Can you tell me when--when you moved here and why that happened?
TE: Two years ago. The house—Michael’s position that he had, the people went out of business, which is my landlord—when I say Michael—went out of business. And Michael had—he was fixing the home up and going to redo the shop and all and make my little restaurant really, really restaurant-nice, you know. And he lost his position because the--the business that he was working for closed down. So he had to put his house up for sale and move to another location.

And I couldn’t buy the house because my business—it was a good business now, don’t get me wrong, but—it took--it took care of me, but you know I didn't have money to buy the building because I was going to have to like take the building down and redo it. And so that--that would have been a little much for me. But I thank God it took care of me. My pies and my pralines and my wonderful savory dishes that I made for people took care of me and enabled me to live very good without having to struggle. And I truly enjoyed it.

SR: And now you’re—you didn't have to come too far?
TE: No, just a few blocks down the street from where I used to be, from the 3400 block over to the 5200 block of Magazine Street, and I’m still on Magazine Street. That’s the good thing you know. So the customers could find Tee Eva without struggling.

And of course, after I retired I--I started doing a little work in the movies. Well you know to tell you the truth about it, I did a little work way back in the movies in 1990 when Oliver Stone came here to New Orleans, and--and he was working on this movie *JFK*. And that’s all the people at—see that picture right there? I saw all the people over at De La Salle [High School], and I said, “I wonder what’s going on over there?” Driving down St. Charles Avenue and I had a basket of pies and pralines. So I went and I says, “What’s going on?” And I reached me a newspaper and that’s when it stated it was Oliver Stone, you know, working—going to be working on his movie.

So these people were in line because they were going there for casting. And so I went home and I dressed up. See that outfit I put on? [*Laughs*] And I went back and I started selling pies and pralines at the back of the line. And this young man, he’s—bless his soul, Ready Teddy, we’re trying to find out about him right now, Ready Teddy, where he is. You know he worked at different nightclubs and
he did put on different shows. And I met him for the very first time. And he was sitting there and he was deejaying over at De La Salle and he says, “What kind of pies you have, Ma'am?” And I said, “Oh, my name is Tee Eva.” He said “Well, Tee Eva, what kind of pies you got there?” And I said, “I have a great pie which is sweet potato pecan.” He said, “That’s the pie I want right now.” He said, “That sounds so good.” [Claps]

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So he bought a sweet potato pecan pie. And Ready Teddy and I, we hit it off from then on. Ever since then he had to follow me and find me for that sweet potato pecan pie because that was his favorite pie. And you know about two weeks ago he was doing a show and he fell and broke his back and his neck. And we have been so down since that because we went—some of the Baby Dolls and I, we went over to the University Hospital yesterday hoping we could get to see him but they had moved him. They said they had just moved him yesterday morning sometime to a rehabilitation place. So now we’re trying to find out exactly where he is. But it—you know it is so sad. He worked with us on the—the last time I seen him he worked with us on the Mother-in-Law show, the Burn K-Doe Burn! show; it was down at The Always [Lounge] during the Jazz Fest, this past Jazz Fest. And he came and opened up the show for us every night.

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And it’s such a sad thing. You know we just need to find out where he is, so we can let him know we’re here for him and we want to do whatever we can to keep things going for him until something could be done for him.

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SR: That’s terrible.

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TE: But that’s when I—so then I started working—.

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SR: Well can I back up? Can you explain, because we’re not videoing, what you put on when you dressed up?

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TE: Oh, I had a red—the material, it was like Spanish, like you would say like Mexican. It had red, yellow; it was a weave skirt, cotton weave skirt, and it had all the beautiful colors—the red, the yellow, green. It had black in it. Oh that skirt—that skirt was gorgeous. And I had a red blouse on. I had a red blouse on and I had on this gray shawl—cape that came over my shoulders; turtleneck, and I had on red
boots. And I had a beige scarf tied on my head, and I had grapes. They were in bunches; the earrings were in bunches of grapes. And everybody thought that I was a person that was going to get the part in the movie and I didn't even know what the part was [Laughs]. It was so funny.

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They said, “Go and strut it, Mama. You got it; you got it; you got it.” They said, “Oh God, she’s going to get that part. She’s going to get it.” And I don’t even know what the part was. All I was trying to do was sell my pies and pralines you know. I had made one $50 that day and I was trying to make another $50, and that would be my earnings for the day, you know what I’m saying.

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And I sold myself up to the casting table and the lady said to me, she said, “Would you like to be in the movies?” And I said, “Of course.” [Laughs] I just—she says, “What’s your name,” and then took a picture of me with my basket and all. And then they—and my telephone number—and about a week later my phone rang and they says, “We are looking for Eva Perry. This is the movie calling.” And I said, “Oh, this is me; this is me.” [Laughs] They said, “Well do you want to work in the movies?” I said, “Yes, I do.” And so then they told me what time call time was and where I had to be at, and the time I had to be, and to bring some clothes and a pair of shoes.
Well you should have seen me getting all these clothes and stuff for the very first time. I guess I had a whole wardrobe. And I took it in with me [Laughs] when I had to go on the set. And what is the first time I worked in the movie? Where did we go? It was right downtown, right by Lafayette Square. That’s where it was. And it was like holding court you know for Oliver’s—like holding court for JFK. And we were like walking across Lafayette Square from the courthouse over to the other side of the park where—and you know, turning around and walking backwards and forwards, like we were taking records from one part of the court to the other. And it was funny. We thought we was going to be seen. [Laughs] We couldn’t wait for JFK to come out. It was two-and-a-half hours long. It was a long movie, but I think we worked about 60 days as extras in this movie.

SR: So you weren't a praline-seller in the movie or anything?

TE: I did get to sell my pies and pralines on the set, but I mean they didn't show that.
SR: When you—

TE: In fact, you didn't see anything because really it was all cut out on the floor. And I think what happened, when they first started doing movies here in New Orleans, the lighting system, it wasn’t good. They had to really get all that stuff together. But the movie, we went to see the movie and it was two-and-a-half hours long [Laughs] and we never did see nobody we knew in the movie. [Laughs] It was so funny. That was funny because you see all this work we did getting up early in the morning. We used to have to get up like 4:00 or 5 o'clock in the morning and be out on the set by 6 o'clock and hauling all these shoes and clothes out there on the set. [Laughs] You lay around all day long. Well they fed you good, you know. 

And sometimes you didn't even get called. But we got used to it because I worked every day. It was $50 a day and it helped me to buy ingredients to make my pies and pralines for my business, and help me to pay my rent. You know it--it was like my--my income, you know what I’m saying. And so I was happy. I wasn’t sad about anything. I went out happy strutting every day. I was going to work, and
in the movies, you see working for the movie department, so all that was well and fine with me.

00:40:55

And I had checks coming in the mail. Oh gosh that was exciting; yeah, you know. And they had people walking around talking about they’re looking for work and here I’m--I’m a movie star. [Laughs] That was funny.

00:41:12

SR: And you got to sell your pies and pralines.

00:41:14

TE: And I got to sell my pies and pralines, yes, build up a clientele like that. I mean you could be—it’s wonderful to be industrious. You don’t know what you could do unless you try. All you got to do is try and it’s amazing what can come out of the box from trying.

00:41:34

And I had no time to socialize with anyone because I’m so busy being a movie star. I didn't have time to socialize. [Laughs] Then when I’m off I have to catch up making my products and I got to go make my market and stuff. So I’m a businesswoman, you see what I’m saying, so I really didn't have time. My family,
they--they would call and they’d get the machine and it says, “Hello. Sorry I can't talk to you right now because I’m very busy, but as soon as I can I’ll get back to you.” And that was on that machine for a very long time. And they would have to come home and hope to see me. If not, they had to come to the little shop you know and knock on the door because I’d have the shop locked. I’m working late at night getting caught up with my pies and pralines.

00:42:31

But it was much fun. I never got lonesome, you know. And I had fun doing what I was doing.

00:42:39

SR: Tell me: I’d love to know how you learned how to make pies and pralines. Who taught you how to cook?

00:42:44

TE: Oh that stems--that stems—it started at home. You know all--all the women in my family, they—my mama’s family, my daddy’s family, they all country women and they all knew how to cook and bake. So I--I didn't have a problem learning how to make food taste good and look good because I stayed in the kitchen all the time. And, “May I have some of this? Can I have a piece of that?
Can I taste this? Give me the bowl,” you know. I was scraping the bowl all the time and licking my fingers. “I’ll wash the bowl. Just give me the bowl.” You know they’d mix up the cake or whatever, the cake batter, or they’re making cornbread. And they made the cornbread sweet, so after the sweet, “Give it to me; I’ll--I’ll clean it up for you.”

00:43:41

But it all started at home, and on Sundays we had a very special dessert. And that was lemon icebox pie and bread pudding with raisins. We didn't have them both. We had one or the other. And I always had the choice of what dessert we will have today—this Sunday, you know—because Sunday was a special day. We went to Sunday school on the Sunday morning and we went to church. Come back home from Sunday school, and--and after Sunday school we’d go to our 11 o'clock service. You did nothing else but go to church on a Sunday. And when you’d come home you’d get out of your dress shoes and clothes and you’d get comfortable. And the good food that has been made, like the night before, and it’s put out on a table the next day. It’s all heated up and put out on the table. Our table was set every Sunday. We sat at a table that was fit for a king, because that’s the way the family was. You had to—everybody sit down and have food together at the same time and enjoy the goodness and give thanks to the Lord.

00:45:02
And that’s what we did on Sundays. And on a Sunday evening, which would be Sunday afternoon, we had evening services. We had two services a day, 11:00 a.m. and in the evenings at 5:00. And we had, it’s called BTU, Baptist Training Union. And we had that; we studied the Bible for an hour and then the services started. And when we’d come home we had that great dessert. We either had that bread pudding with a good icing on it, or if we didn't have the bread pudding we had the lemon icebox pie. And we looked forward to that every Sunday evening when we’d come home from church. And we had a radio station that we listened to when we’d come home from church. And it was Randy; it was in Nashville, Tennessee, this radio station. And the name of the--the disc jockey was Randy. And he would come on and he would play all the good gospels, the Caravans and Mahalia Jackson, Rosetta Thorpe and just all these wonderful people. And we would listen to the radio and that’s—no TV. We’d listen to the radio and we would listen to the gospel until the wee-hours of the morning, until you’d—whenever you’d drift off to sleep. But that’s how your Sunday was spent.

It was wonderful. It was beautiful. And we never had no problems. All the neighbors got along well.
SR: Where was this? Where did you grow up?

TE: I grew up Washington and Claiborne and in that vicinity. Well we really—it was at 2929 Washington Avenue, right at the corner of Claiborne. They had a bus stop there. They still have a bus stop there. And across the street it’s got a Pizza Hut now. It’s closed; been closed for some years, but it was Ricca’s Supermarket there. And my aunt raised me, which was my mama’s older sister. And she worked for the Ricca’s; she was their cook. And--and I guess she rented from them, or you know she lived in a house—one of the properties that they had there. Look at the Roman Candyman. I haven't seen him in a long time.

SR: That’s a nice sight.

TE: Yes, I forgot how many years that is. Isn't that wonderful?
SR: Yeah, it’s—the Roman Candyman was just passing outside, and it’s a mule-drawn wooden cart and the owner vends taffy, Roman Candy.

00:48:28

TE: Yes, for many, many years. So getting back to Tee Eva’s, her and her family where she’s raised up at—Washington and LaSalle—I mean Washington and— and Claiborne. And right on the corner of Washington and Willow there was a Greek store. And you know what they had there? Ice cups—icee; it was about two ounces of it. It cost one penny. It was one penny, and I mean you got a sno-ball now but all you needed was one penny and you got this little frozen cup. And every time I’d find a penny or somebody would give me a penny, I’d go to the corner of Washington and Willow by the Greek store and got me an icee. I’d walk all day long. [Laughs]

00:49:21

SR: So that’s kind of like a popsicle in a cup?

00:49:24

TE: Yeah, it’s in a cup, uh-huh. It’s just like, yeah, and there’s some people that still make them today. Uh-hm, still make icee today for their children, you know.
And they—I think they use maybe a little larger cup, and now maybe it’s like—maybe eight or nine ounces now. But this was like two ounces or an ounce.

00:49:49

SR: And what kind of flavors were there?

00:49:49

TE: They had strawberry, spearmint, and pineapple. That was the three flavors, the same as the sno-balls, strawberry and spearmint. And the Greeks—they were there for years, and he had one daughter and I guess she became like a big sister of mine, because I used to be there by the Greeks every day—every day. It was a store; they sold material, you know, and they sold rations, different kinds of rations at the store. But they made these little cups, frozen cups. And that was my fantasy to go over there every day, and I enjoyed it. But we moved from there to Washington and LaSalle in the Magnolia Projects when they first came up. That’s—we were one of the first families to move there.

00:50:44

SR: And you say that your aunt raised you?
TE: Yeah, my mama’s older sister, uh-huh. My mama’s older sister raised me.

My mama passed when I was 10-years-old in childbirth, yeah.

SR: I’m sorry.

TE: I learned to cook and I learned to cook well. My aunt, she let me have the kitchen and try to do different little dishes you know. She was—she was a good aunt. She was a good mom. The children said she was mean [Laughs] but she wasn’t. What they didn't understand, she wasn’t mean but she was stern and she wanted—if she said to do something, she meant for you to do that, just *that* you know. And hey, if you listened to her you wouldn’t go wrong. But if you didn't listen to her, well hey, your behind belonged to her because she was going to put something. She was going to tan your butt. [Laughs] So they called that mean, you know, uh-hm.

SR: Is she the one who would be making the icebox, the lemon icebox pie?
TE: Yeah, she made the lemon icebox pies and she made pound cakes and she made bread pudding, and God, she stewed the good hens and all. That lady—I used to know how to make home brew but I done forgot now, because she made home brew. Yeah, she knew how to make home brew. And she canned and—well, she jarred; she didn't can but she jarred vegetables and she jarred fruits and stuff. And she even knew how to make a hair grease for your hair out of prickly pear. And they grew in the yard. It was like you—she was just—that lady was so smart. She had a brain like you would not believe.

SR: What was her name?

TE: Her name was Melvina DeShields.

SR: Did she make pralines?
TE: No, she didn't make pralines, no. My other aunt made pralines. She didn't make the pralines.

SR: What was your aunt’s name who made the pralines?

TE: Her name was Ida, uh-huh.

SR: What are some of your earliest praline memories, and do you make pralines like Ida did?

TE: Oh yeah, I make the same way she made them, uh-huh. I--I cook my food like both of my aunts. All my food, it’s made like the family cooks because that’s where I learned to cook, was at home. And then I worked in a lot of restaurants afterwards, you know after I got grown—got to be grown—but my cooking experience, I learned it at home. How to make food taste good and how to make
food look good, because these women, they worked in homes on St. Charles Avenue for big families and they cooked big parties back then.

My Aunt Ida, she worked when it was Mercy Hospital in the Irish Channel, and she worked for the Sisters. Not, you know, cooking in the hospital for the hospital; she worked for the Sisters, and the Sisters, they had elegant food and elegant parties and stuff. And that’s where I first saw Louis Jordan on a—he was on a—oh, what is it called again? It’s like a video machine; I forget the name of it now. If it was called a nickelodeon, but I know you put money in it and then he’d come up on the screen. And Louis Jordan would be singing the *Saturday Night Fish Fry*. Those Sisters loved that number and they would be dancing and they had a great time. [*Laughs*]

**SR:** Really?

**TE:** Because that’s where I spent most of my time and my aunt used to take me to work with her in the summertime when school was closed every day. And that’s where I spent most of my time, inside of the--the Sisters’ home where she did the
meals and stuff. And they would be drinking and having a party and they loved Louis Jordan and that *Saturday Night Fish Fry*.

00:55:23

I--I can remember that song better than I can remember any of them, you know. [*Laughs*] Because they would Lindy Hop; boy they would be kicking and--and little skirts would be going and whipping around their legs and stuff. [*Laughs*] That was so funny to me, you know. Because it was something I had never seen before. I didn't know Sisters got there and danced and let their hair down like that. But they sure did; they had their selves a wonderful time. Yeah, that’s where I learned all my--my cooking skills from. I worked with the Orleans Parish School Board for years, and then I learned to cook institutional, not knowing that I was going to even go into a business of my own. I had no idea that something like this was going to transpire. But of course that was many, many years ago.

00:56:20

And I got to start seeing where cooking was getting to be such an elegant and big business, and one day I was watching TV. This was years later. And who I see, you know just paying a little attention, Paul Prudhomme. He was doing a blackened redfish, and he’s from Lafayette, Louisiana. So I’m thinking, you know I’m saying, “I need to find something to do that’s going to make me more money than what these people are paying me.” I mean this was years later, you know. I’m
all separated from husband, children grown, and I got to make a living for myself. And this is where the business come in at.

00:57:20

And you know what I did? I got a flyer. I sat down on a sheet of paper and I wrote out a menu and it said “From My Kitchen to Yours,” and it said “Creole and Cajun Food.” And I gave myself a name, Tee Eva, great entrepreneur. And that’s how it all happened.

00:57:50

SR: Were you called Tee Eva before then?

00:57:53

TE: No. I said to my daughter, I said, “You know, I want to do a business.” She says, “Go ahead if you want to do it.” She said, “Do it,” she said, “But I’m not going to be able to help you, not--not physically.” She said, “But if you want to do a business, fine with me.” So I said, “But it’s got to have a name”. And it’s like, she didn't hesitate. She says, “Well, you got a lot of nieces, you have a lot of great-nieces, great-great-nieces.” She says, “—and nephews,” she says, “So name it Tee Eva.”
SR: Because Tee is short for Auntee or Auntie, is that right?

TE: Uh-hm, yeah. So that’s it. It didn't take a long time to get the name, uh-hm.

SR: That’s a great story. Paul Prudhomme inspired you to open your business?

TE: He did. Because what happened, if you think back in the ‘80s, they were having this Creole—I mean this Cajun craze, you know. Oh Cajun this and Cajun that and Cajun the other; oh, just love a lot of Cajun. And I says, “Well come on.” You know how you think to yourself. You’re watching TV. “Well, everybody is not Cajun. What happened to the Creoles? Hey, I’m a bayou girl too, you know what I’m saying? I know something about the bayous.” I got family out there, both sides, male and female—on Mama’s side and Daddy’s side. They--they were all born right there on the bayous. So I mean I can't be left out of this, you know.
And quickly, it didn't take me long. *[Finger Snaps]* I said, “Well okay, Paul, you got that going for you.” Well Paul had money in his background. See, I didn't have money. But I didn't let that discourage me. I didn't worry about the money Paul had because I knew how to put the meals together and I can make money. So that’s what was important. Always just, you know don’t lose sight of what your goals are and what you would like to do in life. And you look at the other person and you say, “Well if he or she got this or he or she got that, don’t let that bother you.” *[Emphasis Added]* What did Louis Jordan say? “Sit tight and hold that line.” And don’t—what he say? —“Don’t worry about the mule going blind; just sit tight and hold that line.” *[Laughs]* And he’s going to get you there, you know.

01:00:42

So what I did, as I said earlier, I worked today and what money I made, I put a little bit on the side for this and a little bit on the side for that. And that’s how I did Tee Eva’s. Then the movie came along. Hey, you work those extras. I know, I guess they must have worked three months or more. It might have been six months when they were working on *Interview With the Vampire*. Honey, we went out in the country and we spent nights out there. You’d catch the bus like cattle in the mornings—extras, you know, for the movie. And you’d catch the bus before the sunrise in the morning and freezing cold. And they’d be taking us out to Thibodaux and to Raceland, and those different places for *Interview With the Vampire*. And
Sweetheart, let me tell you something: we froze out there. We sat out there all night long with these little shacks on the outside out there, these little shacks and that wind would be so cold. And sometimes it would be cold and rainy and it would be muddy but we was sitting there shivering, Honey. We were movie stars. [Laughs] We laugh at this a lot of times. Some of my friends, they come by and we sit and we talk about it.

SR: Did you see yourself in that movie?

TE: No, [Laughs] no. I could—the only thing I could tell you is where—“Oh, right there I was in a hammock, right here in a hammock right here,” or, “I was sitting right there. You see that spot right there?” I mean that’s—. [Laughs] You didn't see nobody; you didn't see a soul. But it was fun. It was fun. And the thing about it, you had a $50 check coming in the mail. You know that you was going to get that $50, you know what I’m saying. So hey, another $50; I mean sometimes say one week I might have $400 coming in the mail, you know what I’m saying—$50 a check. And all the checks come at one time. Oh, that look good. Yeah, I’m a movie star. You see what I’m saying, so hey, it was great. It was great. We enjoyed
it and it--it kept me making money. It kept me being able to buy things that I needed to buy for Tee Eva’s Creole soul food. So hey, it--it was all good.

SR: Where in the country is your family from?

TE: They start from Cut Off and they go all the way up to Edgard, Louisiana. Do you know they call it the Battery. The river, they call it the Battery, and they live all along the Battery as you go. They’re up and down the road. Some in Luling; some in Hahnville; some, as I said, over in Edgard; some in the Cut Off; some over in Algiers. You know they’re all along the river, but even Mama and Daddy’s side.

SR: Are you Creole?

TE: The family, yeah, we are, but I don’t know how to speak it. “Parlez-vous Francais”; something like that, or, “Comment ça va,” but I don’t really know the
language as sometimes—. They didn't want us to know the language. They--they knew it. Our fore-parents knew it but they didn't want us to know the language.

01:04:48

SR: Because there was a stigma?

01:04:51

TE: Yeah, uh-huh. It’s like sometimes when I’m talking I can hear it in my speech but I try not to as much as possible. But I had somebody that called the other day and asked me about doing something. They wanted me to help them do a pilot for a movie or something, but I told them I didn't know how to speak Creole because they wanted somebody who knew how to speak Creole. I told them I didn't know how to speak it.

01:05:29

And then also the parents, when they would be talking about something and they didn't want you to know, they would speak it in Creole. So they really didn't want us to learn because they never—. Like today people sit and they’ll talk everything and anything in front of their children, but back then they didn't do it that way, no.
SR: But they taught you how to cook.

TE: Oh yeah, you had better learn how to cook, yeah. They would teach you to cook because that was a must. You’re supposed to learn how to cook. And today the girls, you know some of them they’ll say, “Oh no, cooking. What is that? I don’t know how to do that.” But it’s good to know how to cook. It’s very good. But I’ll tell you, my granddaughter, she enjoys making the pies and the pralines. It’s a business. She enjoys working for herself. She enjoys that. But making dinner, no. You know she would never become a chef. Maybe she might become a pastry chef maybe, but she would never become a savory chef.

SR: Do you make the savory food here then?

TE: Uh-hm, yeah.
SR: I should ask you, what--what are some of your earliest sno-ball memories? When you were buying those frozen cups, were there also sno-balls in your neighborhood?

01:07:06

TE: Yeah. Well the--the frozen cups, I was like four or five years old then when I was buying those frozen cups. And then after that it became the sno-ball as I got older. And then I was going to school, my school years, in elementary school. And the only flavor we had was strawberry, pineapple, and spearmint. That was the only flavors. No other flavors.

01:07:43

Now it wasn’t a sno-ball machine like that. It was a little—it was a little machine and you scraped the ice. You scraped it, a block of ice; you scraped a block of ice. It’s like a scoop or something. And you scraped the block of ice and you put it in a cup. And then you put the flavor on it, but the ice was very coarse. It was coarse ice. It wasn’t fine like the sno-ball ice is today.

01:08:14

SR: Uh-hm. And you have so many flavors now.
TE: Oh yes, they have hundreds of flavors now.

SR: How many do you have, do you know?

TE: Hmm, no, you know I never really counted my flavors. But hmm, looks like it could be about 50. I could have about 50.

SR: What is your most popular flavor?

TE: Wow, the popular flavor here at Tee Eva’s is—I have like three or four, which is Georgia peach, wedding cake, cotton candy, and cake batter, uh-hm. Oh, I left one out: Creole cream cheese. They love that Creole cream cheese.

SR: What does that taste like?
**TE:** It’s kind of like, kind of sour, kind of like cream cheese. It’s kind of like cream cheese. I’ll make you a Creole cream cheese sno-ball. It’s not so sweet. But you’ll enjoy it. Now you could mix it with cherry, black cherry, and it becomes Tiger Blood; Creole cream cheese and black cherry—Tiger Blood. And that’s really good.

**SR:** Did you name that?

**TE:** No, I didn't. I didn't name it. I don’t want to get in these sno-ball wars with these people. [Laughs] I was reading the paper the other day. I said, “Oh, come on. Please. You have a good business, and you’re neighbors. What’s the matter with you? Can't you get along?” You know what I’m saying? I don’t understand them. Why they want to fight over who made the flavor? All you have to do is get—. I think I could make some sno-ball flavor if I wanted to try it but I got enough to do already. [Laughs] So I’m going to stay out of the sno-ball wars. [Laughs]
SR: I should say for the record that there is now a--a trademark war going on between sno-ball makers, of who named a certain flavor first. King cake is one of the ones that they talk about. I'm not sure what the other ones are, but—.

TE: Well you know what? I don’t know what a king cake or what, because I don’t even have king cake here. I probably have it because it’s probably two or three or four flavors. I guess you could take a green flavor, a yellow flavor, and what other color is king cake? Just the colors, you know what I’m saying, and put some cream in it and you’ll probably have a King Cake flavor. [Laughs] Now I hope they don’t come here attacking me about what I said [Laughs] because I just mix my flavors and I call them whatever I want to. That’s what I do.

SR: Is this the machine—?

TE: What I do, I’ll take—I might take wedding cake and tutti-fruitti and maybe granny smith apple, and just trying flavors. And I might mix them up and come up
with something. And I buy them all over there at SnoWizard, so hey, what’s the big deal, huh. [Laughs]

SR: That’s where you buy your extracts, huh?

TE: Yeah, I buy my extracts over there. But I make my syrup. I cook my syrup, you know for my sno-balls. I put it on the stove and my sugar and--and I put something else in my sugar and water and I cook it. And it comes out of there, but a very good syrup; I have a very good syrup with my sno-balls, uh-hm.

SR: And that’s what you mix with the extracts?

TE: Yeah, yeah. And I put some of the extract in it, you know in my bottle and--and mix it, uh-huh. And no, I don’t make the cream flavors, and for the reason I don’t because everybody do not like the cream flavors. So I’ll make the regular sno-ball flavor and if my customer wants cream they can put evaporated milk on
their sno-ball and mix it with evaporated milk, or they could mix it with condensed milk, or they can mix it with ice cream or gummy bears. You know whatever they want to put, they can have it—chocolate syrup. But no, I do not make cream flavors and that’s my reason for not making cream flavors, because I’ve had customers to say that they do not like the cream flavors. So I want to be able to sell all my sno-balls across the board.

SR: What about you? What kind do you like?

TE: Oh, I’m a sno-ball eater. I will eat the sno-ball with condensed milk, and the chocolate ice cream, with vanilla ice-cream, with evaporated milk. I crumble up a fresh-cooked praline and mix it into my sno-ball, and then I’ll put the praline flavor over it. It’s awesome.

SR: I might have to order one of those.
TE: Yeah, I just, I make them—I make them up you know. I make them up as I go.

SR: You’ve always had a sweet tooth?

TE: Always, from—have you heard of sugarcane? Well I guess that started it. [Laughs] And I--I kept all of my teeth. I kept all of my teeth. And I’ve been sucking on some sugarcane since I can remember to say the words sugarcane. I got a sweet tooth. And that’s why I make those pralines, because it started with the sugarcane. And then the pecan trees were right there in the yard, and I’d go out in the country to my relatives’ and we’d pick pecans right there in the yard. And we’d go inside and clean up the pecans and we’d put on some sugar that come from the sugarcane you know. And so--and so we had the pure raw sugar; it’s brown. That come from the sugarcane. And we’ll put some milk and some sugar and some vanilla and mix it up and throw some pecans in it and whip us up some candy and sit down and eat pecan pralines—at no cost.
You know, isn't it the funniest thing, huh, how everything costs us a lot of money today? You know when I was a little girl nothing—it didn't cost you no money for nothing. We’d go out and catch fish; it didn't cost us no money. Shrimp, crawfish, boil them up and cook them up and eat them; it didn't cost us no money. And look how much we have to pay for a pound of crawfish today, huh, or a pound of shrimp.

SR: Or a good piece of fish.

TE: It’s amazing; it’s amazing.

SR: Are you saying that you would get the sugar from the sugarcane just like as a liquid, or would you get it granulated?

TE: No, it would be granulated, the brown sugar after it has been through the mill. And we’d get it like that, brown sugar. You know it’s just like when you get the
milk from the cow before it’s pasteurized. We had a--a dairy farm that we got the milk from the cow before—. We as children, they called it “green milk.” We drank(ed) it you know. But you boil it; you boil the milk overnight today and you let it sit and you strain it through a cheesecloth the next day. And then it’s—then your milk is pasteurized. That’s how they pasteurize it.

SR: So you would pasteurize it at home?

TE: Uh-hm, yeah.

SR: Do you put—? Well, did you then—and also now—butter or cream in your pralines?

TE: Butter and cream. Uh-hm, yeah. They put it in there then, back then, uh-huh.
SR: Did you use a candy thermometer back then?

TE: Oh no. I don’t even know if they had one. They might have had one but we didn't have a candy thermometer. We didn't have candy thermometer, we didn't have measuring cups; we cooked. And we--we cooked by scent; that’s how we cooked.

SR: I know that you said earlier that you granddaughter is the one who makes the pralines now. Does she measure?

TE: She measures, yeah. She measures because this is a different time and age you know. But when I was a child growing up they didn't measure. It was called “dump cooking.” You--you put it in the pot, you washed it—you know you peeled it, you washed it, you cleaned it, whatever you had to do to it, and you put it in a pot and you’d season it up and you’d cook it, yeah.
SR: Did your daughter—or your granddaughter—get her measurements from watching you? Did you write it down?

01:17:41

TE: Oh yeah, I taught her. I taught her, uh-hm, because see, I’ve been to cooking school. You know I got paid for--for my learning, because I learned mine’s through working for the Orleans Parish School Board. And so I you got these big pots here. That’s why they’re there, because I can cook for whatever amount of people. You know, two people or 200 people; 22 people—whatever.

01:18:18

SR: Do you ever do sno-ball parties?

01:18:22

TE: I did. My first sno-ball party I did at Audubon Park. I was down at 4430 Magazine and I had—who was it? It was some of the students from--from Tulane. That was my very first sno-ball party, sno-balls and praline party I did for them. It was for the Business Department. And they were—it was at the closing of school and they had a sno-ball party. That was my very first. So I had—a friend of mine’s had an open-back truck and he put the sno-ball machine in the truck. And we took
the flavors and put them in a big basket in the truck. And then we had ice in containers and, hey, went on up to Tulane over on Freret Street and did my first sno-ball party there.

Then there was a festival down in the Ninth Ward at Martin Luther King School, and I did a sno-ball festival there. That was my second sno-ball festival. And my third sno-ball festival was over here in Audubon Park, off of Magazine. And what school was it? It was a school. I can't remember if it was Newman or—I can't—I think it might have been Newman. And I did a sno-ball festival for them over in the park, yeah.

SR: So once in a while you do?

TE: So I did get—I don’t do them anymore, but I was one of the first. Like you see the people, they now have all the little sno-ball areas around the park now and everywhere.
SR: The trucks?

01:20:19

TE: Yeah, the trucks, and it’s exciting to see them. I like to see them. I enjoy seeing them and I say, “Been there done that,” you know. [Laugh] It’s like I did it first, you know. That’s the good part; I did it. I did it already.

01:20:38

And then you know ideas is—it’s a good thing. Ideas is so much fun. Who had the idea first is like—?

01:20:47

SR: Well you could take—maybe trademark it. [Laugh]

01:20:49

TE: Yeah, well—. [Laugh] And another thing, well, I learned to cook—well I did all these different kinds of wraps. You know, food wraps, and I learned--I learned about cooking on a--on a food truck. It was Hispanic.

01:21:13

SR: Wow, you worked on a Hispanic food truck?
TE: Yeah, learning to make tacos and enchiladas and—.

SR: Oh yeah? When was that?

TE: And all that good stuff. That was back in the ‘80s.

SR: The light is so pretty right now, I’d like to—. I have a couple more questions but I’d like to take a picture of you right there if you don’t mind.

TE: Okay, can you see that picture right there?

SR: Yeah, that’s why I think it’ll make a good one.
TE: That’s good.

SR: Let me just pause this. I won't keep you forever but I have a couple more questions. I’ll just pause it.

TE: Well it’s like I’m still on the—. I haven't lost it yet.

SR: No, I mean you say you’re retired but it’s impressive—

TE: It gives me something to do, somewhere(s) to go, something to do because I’m not a stay-at-home person, so—. And--and I’m so able—I’m so glad that God enables me to be able to do, to help my granddaughter where she can keep it in the family—excuse me—and her grandmother can be her assistant. And I like being her assistant. I enjoy that. It’s my grand-baby, 35 years old and she’s my grand-baby you know. [Laughs] I was only saying yesterday that my grand-babies, they
will always be my grand-babies. I don’t care how old they get. They will be my
grand-babies. They--they’re wonderful kids you know. And I love them and they
love Grandmother. So they will always be my babies—grand-babies.

SR: Well yeah, you must be so proud of her for doing this.

TE: I am because I was wondering who was going to take over—was they going
to just let Tee Eva fold up? And I think that would have broke my heart, you know
because it took very good care of me and it’s something that you learn from home.
This is not something you learn in school. You know, and it’s not nothing to look
down on because whatever your elders teach you, they’re teaching it to you
because it’s something that’s going to carry you through life.

Look at the people that’s out of work now. You are having more shifts
coming up than ever before in history. Even people that’s got money, you know
they’re going into the jobs—it’s out, so they’re learning how to do cupcakes,
they’re learning how to do candy apples, they’re learning how to make popcorn
balls. They are learning things that they should have learned a long time ago when
they were little kids, you know. They’re happy to learn it now because it’s going to make a living for them and because what it is, the businesses now, all the big business is going out and it’s going back to mom-and-pops.

01:24:04

So it’s like, God, you say, “I went to school and I got all this education and I got all these degrees. Now what am I going to do with them? Look what I got hanging up—all these accolades hanging up on the walls. Now what do I do?” You got to go back to the drawing board. Hey, and learn how to make sausage or something you know because that’s what it’s going to wind up being. Learn how to be a shoemaker. Learn how to do something. Learn how to be a dressmaker. It won't hurt. People would love to have some dresses made.

01:24:45

SR: Right.

01:24:46

TE: Because you could get it made like you want it. Now you can't find what you want when you go to the department stores. It’s like all junk and it costs you a lot of--a lot of money. So learn to be a dressmaker. You can learn how to be a whole
lot of things. You probably didn't want to do them then, you know, so now that you got all that education, take it and use it for yourself now.

SR: That’s good advice.

TE: It wouldn’t be a bad idea. I think my—I think my granddaughter truly enjoys what she does.

SR: Well she must because she’s doing a great job.

TE: She is.

SR: And I’m so glad. I didn't realize—
**TE:** She’s got a website you know, and she’s--she’s got her—the people order and she ships, and she makes it and she delivers it. And she gets up very early in the morning and comes to work and she doesn’t abuse her time on the telephone or with friends or anything like that. She’s somewhat like her grandmother. I like that about her. She goes to bed very early at night. I mean she rises very early in the morning. And she did that as a little girl when she was going to what it’s called—pre-K. Her mom put them to bed early at night after their bath and have their supper. Then they’d go down to bed—have a little play time, you know, and then they went down to bed. And they had to get up very early in the mornings. And you know what? She is still on the same schedule. She is still on the same schedule.

01:26:31

She goes to bed early and she gets up early. Sometimes I’ll call her and I’ll say, “Well, I’m going to do some shopping for you at the store. How long are you going to be working?” She’ll say, “Oh, Grandmother” —and it might be about like, I’m talking about like 11 o'clock in the morning—“Oh, Grandmother, I came into work very early and I’m off now.” “Oh, you are?” [Laughs] “I’m off now” —all right.

01:26:59
SR: Does she have children?

01:27:02

TE: No, no children. She said she doesn’t have time to have babies because she’s got a business and that’s her baby. The business is her baby.

01:27:15

SR: One thing I wanted to ask is, there’s this term in New Orleans, *sweet shop*.

01:27:19

TE: Yeah.

01:27:20

SR: Is that what you would call this place?

01:27:23

TE: Well I guess you would. I guess they’d call it a sweet shop because it says Tee Eva’s Praline and Pies. But really when I had the business I called it—I named it Tee Eva’s Praline, Pies, and Cookery. So when you say “cookery,” that means
you cook other things besides praline and pies. So I don’t have it anymore; my granddaughter have it so she’s got Tee Eva’s Praline and Pies.

SR: So you don’t—?

TE: It was established—it was established in 1989. That’s when it was established, okay.

SR: You don’t—you don’t think of it as a sweet shop. What does that term sweet shop mean?

TE: Sweet shop. When you have a sweet shop, you go to the sweet shop and you Lindy Hop. You go—you have—what do they call it?—frosties or root beer floats, ice cream, sweet shop. You have that kind of stuff. They have a--a music box and it plays music and the boys and girls, they dance at the hop, hop, hop. [Laughs]
SR: I don’t think I’ve ever been to that kind of place but it sounds fun.

TE: No, that’s because when I was a teenager we went to the sweet shop. And we had malts, you know, and we had the root beer floats, those kinds of things, uh-huh. That was the sweet shop. And you could, like I said you could dance, you know, uh-huh.

SR: Kind of like an ice cream shop?

TE: Yeah, a sweet shop.

SR: Party?

TE: Yeah, uh-hm. You know it was all sweet stuff.
SR: What would you call your style of pralines?

TE: Oh they are the original pralines, original. They’re made with sugar and cream, butter, pecans, and vanilla. Those are original pralines.

Now when you make the pralines with—when you’re putting syrup in them and all that other stuff, those are pecan candies, different kinds of pecan candies—.

SR: Corn syrup, you mean?

TE: Those, yeah, those are pralines because that’s how a praline is made. See, you don’t make the—when this guy came from, I guess Europe—the French guy—and he made the praline with sugar and water and pecans.
SR: Who is that?

TE: I forget his name but it’s a French guy that came here to Louisiana and he made the--the praline with the—well I guess the Frenchmen, I would say the Frenchmen. And they made pralines with sugar and vanilla and water, granulated sugar. And they put two or three slices of pecan halves in it. And that was a pecan praline. It had a sugar glaze, uh-hm.

SR: You do some other variations—

TE: That was--that was their pralines, the Frenchmen.

SR: You do some variations, right? The coconut or—?
**TE:** Uh-hm, we do coconut and we—at Valentine’s we do chocolate. At Easter time we do chocolate. Christmastime we do chocolate, coconut or pecan, but you know certain holidays. Or if a customer orders—special orders—and that’s what they want, we’ll make it for them.

01:31:38

**SR:** When you were growing up, were there those variations?

01:31:42

**TE:** No, when we were growing up it was just a pecan praline and we were just happy to have it—you know to have some candy around in the house. But we didn't worry about chocolate or--or anything like that. We had pecan pralines and that was it. That was the original right there. And we still stick to the original.

01:32:08

**SR:** Well you’ve given me so much time. I want to wrap this up, but I have—I want to circle back to one thing. You mentioned the Baby Dolls earlier, and I feel like I can't interview you with--without asking about the Baby Dolls. Can you describe to me what that is?
TE: Baby Doll, it started back in the early days, very early days. I guess about probably 80—80-some years ago or more along with the [Mardi Gras] Indians when they came out. When the Indians, on the Mardi Gras morning they would come out and the girls would come out, the young ladies, they would come out with the Indians. And they wore little flouncy dresses and they had these net stockings on and they would put a garter on the stocking—you know a fancy garter. And they would say, like when the people would say, “Throw me something, Mister.” Well when the Baby Doll, when she’d go out with the Indians and the guy would say to her, “Oh, you sure look pretty; you look like a baby doll,” and she would smile. You know, and put a little pose on and he would give her some money and she’d stick it in her bra. Or she’d stick it in her garter. But that’s where Baby Dolls come from. [Laughs]

They’re going to go out and they’re going to make some money today. It’s Mardi Gras day you know. And they’re going to dress all up and be pretty and go out with the Indians. And that’s how it all began, the Baby Dolls. Say, “Oh, the guy is calling you a Baby Doll. You are so pretty; you look just like a Baby Doll.”
SR: And you’re a Baby Doll?

01:33:59

TE: And I’m a Baby Doll. [Laughs] But I’m a good Baby Doll. [Laughs] I do things to help in the community and we go to—the Baby Dolls and I, we go around to hospitals and nursing homes and we give out fruits and we give toys out and we have parades and we’ll throw out, you know probably some of Tee Eva’s pralines to the people that’s standing at the parade watching the Baby Dolls. So we make merry around town for the children and the adults as Baby Dolls. And at— at Thanksgiving time, we’ll go wherever they’re serving food and we’ll help to serve the homeless Thanksgiving food, so we do good—a lot of good things.

01:34:55

SR: Are you dressed up when you do that, like a Baby Doll?

01:34:57

TE: Oh yeah, we dress up as a Baby Doll, yeah. We put our Baby Doll outfits on and sometimes we get to do some stage work with Quintron. You know Quintron and Miss Pussycat? Yes, sometimes we get to work with them; the Baby Dolls, we get to work on stage with him. Sometimes we get to work with Al “Carnival Time”
Johnson, you know when he’s having a show. So the Baby Dolls, they can get to be very busy sometimes and have lots of fun, yeah.

01:35:27

SR: How many Baby Dolls are there?

01:35:30

TE: Well we started out, we had about—when we started with the Baby Dolls we had like 75 Baby Dolls, and it has dwindled down now to about probably 15, but it’s some of them since Katrina, they’re out of town. They live different places. Now we have one of our Baby Dolls, I think she lives in St. Louis, Missouri. She’s a school teacher. They’re all—most of these women are professional women that’s Baby Dolls today, our Baby Dolls are.

01:36:01

And she’s formed a group out in St. Louis, Missouri, and every once in a while we’ll hear from her and the Baby Dolls out there. They’re doing fine. And she’s having a great time and still being a Baby Doll.

01:36:20

SR: How do you get to be a Baby Doll?
TE: Well you could join the Baby Dolls. We have meetings once a month and it depends on what restaurant. We go to different restaurants you know and have a meeting, and it also puts some money there. We’ll have lunch at different restaurants and if somebody wants to join at the time, they could join. And mainly be—our meetings, we have meetings once a month, and when there’s something going on. I think it’s the Lady Fest in November; we’re already booked to work with the Lady Fest. It’s going to be a big parade. There’s something going on. It’s in the Quarters. And it’s this—she wants us to serve the—she wants the Baby Dolls to serve with them for this parade. So we get to be in a lot of parades.

SR: Chris Owens.
TE: Chris Owens, yeah. We were in Chris Owens’ parade this past Easter. That was fun. I enjoyed it. That’s the first time I’ve been in Chris Owens’ parade. And I think Al “Carnival Time” was in her parade, too. They had quite a few people that I knew was in her parade. And two of our Baby Dolls, they were shown on the--on the parade—. You know when they showed the news and two of our Baby Dolls was shown dancing in the parade. Yeah, that was really neat. We had a great time.

[Smiles]

01:38:03

SR: I also have to ask you about your relationship to Ernie K-Doe.

01:38:10

TE: Ernie K-Doe, I have been knowing Ernie for a lot of years because he grew—well he didn't grow up in the Dew Drop [Inn], but he grew up as a child in this church was New Hope Baptist Church back on Jackson Avenue and Derbigny, and it was the Reverend Blake. He was under his direction, him and his mom. They were members there. And Ernie used to sing as a child. He used—they’d stand him up on the chair and he used to sing gospels at this church. And his mom sung in the choir.

01:38:53
So as Ernie grew—we lived over in the Magnolia Project, as I said before, 2833 LaSalle between Sixth and Washington, which was right across the street from the Dew Drop. And I belonged to the church on Washington Avenue, but when Ernie grew up playing music, singing and playing music, him and what’s-his-name—oh God. What is the guy’s name? I’m trying to think of his name and he’s very famous. I know along with Irma [Thomas] and—it wasn’t the one who played the music for Ernie; it was this guy who played the music for Ernie, and I can't think of his name right now. But he played at the Dew Drop a lot, music at the Dew Drop Inn, which was 2836 LaSalle. And Ernie used to sing on the show all the time and he’d play at the Tijuana Club down on Saratoga Street.

01:40:14

And he was just a--a great guy that loved to sing, and he was a showman, a great showman. And he worked along with Clarence Frogman Henry and a whole lot of other guys that worked over at the Dew Drop Inn. And I used to see Ernie going there. I couldn’t go there because—I don’t know why though, because it looked like to me Ernie was—I was a couple of years older than Ernie, but I didn't go because I was in church and they’d say when you belong to church, you could not go nightclubbing. So I didn't go nightclubbing. [Laughs] That--that was the cause, is there.

01:40:56
But anyway, Ernie, he—I had been knowing him as an artist and I used to hear him singing all the time and seeing him going to the Dew Drop Inn all the time. And then for years after that I didn't see Ernie anymore. I don’t—I don’t know what happened to Ernie. I hadn’t seen him for years. The last time I had seen Ernie again, when I saw him again, somebody said it was Ernie K-Doe and he was walking around in the park and he had a coat on. And I said, “That can't be Ernie.” And they said, “Yes, it’s Ernie.”

01:41:31

So I paid it no attention. But anyway, long years after that I was working with Tee Eva’s business then and I had WWOZ on. And I heard them talking about Ernie K-Doe and getting married. And I said, “Ernie K-Doe getting married?” Well I knew he had been married already, but you know all this was stuff that had passed and gone. He was getting married again to a new wife. And I saw it on the television when Angela Hill was interviewing him and Antoinette. And I saw that show that day. I was in my shop working. It was down on Magazine. And I said, “Okay, that’s Ernie K-Doe and that’s Ernie K-Doe’s wife. And Ernie looked like a brand-new person to me because, you know, the way he had looked when I saw him back in the years and when I seen him now.

01:42:37
So anyway I said, “I’m going to go down one day and I’m going to meet his wife.” I enjoyed the stories she was telling about how she was helping Ernie and what she was doing for him. So I went down; I didn't go as soon as I saw it on television. I think it was the whole next year when I went down and I met Ernie and--and met his wife. And I brought some flyers down and I asked her could I put them there in her place? And she told me, “Yeah.” And it was during Jazz Fest time and she was busy.

01:43:07

So I said, “I’m going to come back another time when you’re not busy.” Well I did notice she had a nice music box there with all the good old music on it you know. And I said, “I’ll come back again.”

01:43:21

So when I went back another time, it wasn’t nobody there. It was just her and Ernie. And I was drinking Budweiser beer at the time. I don’t drink beer now. I stopped drinking beer years ago. I ordered a beer and I sat there and I laughed and I talked with them and I introduced myself. Again I laughed and talked with them, had a beer, and invited them to a beer. And I put $5 in the box and played some of the good old numbers that I liked on the box. And I love to dance, and I danced to the music you know. And so I kept going once in a while; I’d go back again and I would go back again. And then finally we became friends, Antoinette and I.
And she said to Ernie—she would be sewing or doing something all the time, making clothes for him you know. So she said, “Ernie,” she said, “You know what?” She said, “Tee Eva is so light on her feet,” and said, “She’s a great dancer.” She said, “Why don’t you let Tee Eva and I be your backup singers and dancers and that will broaden your stage. And you’ll have a whole new outfit on the stage?” She said, “Like Ike and Tina Turner,” you know. And he says, “All right.” You know he didn't hesitate. He said, “All right.”

So then we started rehearsing our little dance and buying our little outfits and stuff. And when Ernie had gigs we started going out and she made capes for Ernie and all. And that’s how it all started. And I worked with Ernie and Antoinette, I think it was like six years before he passed. And it was something I always wanted to do, like sing and dance on a big stage. Got to go to Washington, DC; [Excitement]—ooooh that was cool. And Shirley Caesar, I loved that lady’s singing and I had never met her before, and I got to sing and dance on stage with Miss Shirley Caesar in Washington, DC for the 4th of July. That was one of the biggest and one of the proudest moments of my life. I truly, truly enjoyed that. I didn't know I was going to go that far with Ernie. [Laughs]
And then I got to work three Jazz Fests with him and that was something. You know a big stage and I always wanted to do. I said, “Hey, you never know what’s in store for you,” and it just—my life just got more interesting and more interesting. Things just started happening for me you know. And that was the only place for I would say six years, the only place I would ever go besides when we’d go out to do a show, beside at Tee Eva’s and down by the Mother-in-Law Lounge. I didn't go nowhere else; that was the only place. Wasn’t that something?

01:46:30

SR: Sounds pretty fun.

01:46:31

TE: It--it was lots of fun. And I mean I would spend nights there with them because they didn't have, like during the week, no customers; no customers all night long. You see how long we was in here with no customers? Well you’d be surprised. That’s the way businesses are in New Orleans, you know. And then sometimes you could get so busy and you could be busy all day long and then boom. After that, two--three days you might not do nothing. But it’s still fun. You meet people. And you just keep cooking up what you do best and keep laughing and talking and keep praying and keep hoping, and something happens you know.
Through prayers it happens. Either they come through on the telephone or they come through the door—somebody, some ways, uh-hm.

01:47:21

But yeah, that’s how we met, and--and we were friends. We became like sisters and brothers. We were like three peas in a shell, the three of us, yeah.

01:47:33

SR: That’s a great story.

01:47:34

TE: And I would bring him a sweet potato pie every day. Uh-huh, every day, the little one—he ate the little one. But every day he had a sweet potato pie and he said, “Ain't nobody makes sweet potato pies like Tee Eva,” and he said couldn’t nobody cook red beans like his wife. [Laughs] But for those six years, I mean it was—we had a relationship with each other longer than six years but for six years in the music business we—. It gave me that opportunity to work with him. And I did some extensive traveling with him and Antoinette you know, and--and it was just fun. It really was.

01:48:17
And you know the most--the most interesting thing about it, a lot of people thought I was making a whole bunch of money, I didn't get no money. It was advertisement. I was advertising my business. You know whatever it takes for you to do your business, and you want to make your business work, that’s what you do. But I wasn’t getting paid money for that. Now a lot of people said, “Oh gosh, she got so much money. She’s got a business and then she sings with Ernie.” But it-it brought me a lot of business.

SR: I’m sure.

TE: Yeah, and that’s why I'm still in business, uh-huh.

SR: Well that’s a great story and I’m sorry that they’re both passed.
TE: It gave me an opportunity. It was something I always wanted to do, so I got that opportunity to do that, to sing on the big stage and to travel and go places, and it didn't cost me any money.

01:49:25

SR: You’ve done so much, and mostly I’ve heard about your life past 50.

01:49:31

TE: Yeah, [Excitement] you know what? When I made 50-years-old, let me tell you. When I made 50, I said, “All right, Eva.” This is what I told myself: “You are now 50-years-old. Now you got to really get up off of it. You have worked for people all your life. It’s time for you to do something for yourself.” And that’s when I decided, “Hey, I’m going to make things happen for me now. I’m not working for no other people.” Because see, I had worked for people. I worked in their restaurants, they paid me a little money and I was so good until they would call other people in and say, “She’s the one that’s got all the people coming in these doors, that lady right there.” And I got pats on the shoulder.

01:50:27

I said, “Well it’s time to give up the pats on the shoulder and start making some money for Eva.” And that’s what I did because they weren't paying me my
worth. It was time for—when I made 50-years-old, that was it. I was determined I wasn’t going to work for nobody else. When I worked I was going to work for Eva and I was going to charge my price. They weren't going to tell me what they were going to pay me. I was going to tell them what I will work for them and what they have to pay me for. And that’s what I did. I turned it—I had to turn it around, yeah.

01:51:06

SR: That’s very inspiring.

01:51:09

TE: All this stuff started working for me after 50-years-old. When I made 50, I said, “I’m a whole half of 100-years-old.” I’ve got to get a life for myself now. No, people just been using me all these years. Well, I mean they didn't use me for 50 years because I had to grow up from a little girl, from a baby girl up to a teenager and then become a woman and then have children—get married and have children and raise your children, you know. So I would say 25 years—25 years, because the first 25 years, I give that to family. You know, rearing family and--and being a mom and a wife and all of that.

01:51:49
And then after that, after 25 years, that was it; it was like blip—gone. Where she gone? Her and her husband separated. She gone. Where she gone? We don’t know where she gone but she gone. It was time for me to get a life for myself. And that’s what I did.

01:52:11

SR: Thank you for telling me your story. [Laughs] I think that’s a good place to end.

01:52:16

TE: Yeah, I think so. [Laughs] Getting a life for myself, yes, and it has been most enjoyable. At 76-years-old, I’m enjoying life, and--and I got married five years ago.

01:52:35

SR: I didn't know that.

01:52:38

SR: Why don’t you just tell me his name, so we know?

TE: Well my last name is Adams now. Yeah, uh-huh, that’s—but everybody still calls me Tee Eva, so I respond to Tee Eva. I forget my name is Adams.

SR: Well congratulations.

TE: Thank you so much, but I’m having a wonderful time being married and having a husband. I’ve been traveling for the last five years, you know, so—my husband and I—which is really good. And when I think—you know I was on the Food Network, and I think like three times, and so Paula Dean and her boys, they came down and we made gumbo together when I was down the street. And every time—I like to watch her show. Out of all of the cook shows on the internet—on the Food Network, I’d rather Paul Dean’s shows because her shows, I enjoy. She goes back like I do in time and she tells her story how she started as the bag lady.
You know she used to make the sandwiches. The only thing about it, she sent her boys out. But I started in a basket. I didn't send nobody out. I went out with my basket.

01:54:04

I made—get up early and make my products and go out and sell my products, and then I’ll come in and open up my shop for lunchtime and be ready to serve my lunch. But you know it’s a one-woman show, I was. I was, but she--she had help; she had her two boys. But I was a one-woman show, and I did it. God blessed me, stayed well and kept me feeling good and kept me looking good and enabled me to go back, and like I would go—was it Saturday nights? Friday nights at Tipitina’s, Tuesday night at Howlin’ Wolf, Saturday night—Thursday nights at Rock-n-Bowl. Those were my nights—those were my three nights a week that I’d go out and work those three places—Tipitina’s, Howlin’ Wolf—not Howlin’ Wolf; up here, Maple Leaf, Maple Leaf, yeah—and--and Rock-n-Bowl. Those was my three places that I’d work at night.

01:55:14

I mean I was a working woman. I was—besides being a movie star, you know I was a singer, a dancer; I mean could you imagine [Laughs]. You know I was busy, huh? Yeah, I’d get off of one set and go on the other set. It was all right. It was all good—single, no babies, and had nobody but me. All I had to do was go.
I’d just go home and get a shower and change clothes and throw a bundle of clothes and shoes in the trunk of the car and—-and deodorant and stuff and [Claps] boom—gone again. I was a busy woman and I had fun doing it.

01:55:52

SR: And now you have a whole new chapter.

01:55:53

TE: Now I got a whole new—I got a husband [Laughs] five years now and we just throw stuff—. I said, “Come on, Honey; let’s go.” He’s got to go because, see, that’s what I’m used to. I’m used to the road. He got a road hog here, you know so—. Hey and we go. And he enjoys going because he’s a truck driver and I love that. He loves the highway and I do too, yeah. And we have much fun, uh-huh.

01:56:21

SR: Great. Well thank you so much for sharing your story. I’m hoping to get some photos before it gets too dark.

01:56:30

TE: Oh okay, you want to do it outside or what?
SR: Yeah, and here too.

TE: Or you want me to make a sno-ball or what?

SR: Sure, thank you. I’ll end this.

[End Tee Eva Interview]