

**TERRY FORD**  
Curve, TN

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, Southern Foodways Alliance  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
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**[Begin Terry Ford Interview]**

**00:00:04**

**Amy Evans Streeter:** This is Thursday, March 3, 2005, and I'm in Curve, Tennessee, with Terry Ford. This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance.

**00:00:24**

Alright. Mr. Ford, if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself for the record and stating your birth date, as well.

**00:00:33**

**Terry Ford:** Terry Royce Ford, born January 22, 1947.

**00:00:42**

**AES:** Okay, and we're here to talk about the Southern Foodways Alliance and founding of the organization, and can you describe for us how you came to be involved with the Southern Food—the group of founders initially?

**00:00:58**

**TF:** Originally we had a—a—over the years we had different organizations in—in Southern food. And we—we—Jan Shackelford and Jeanne—I mean Jeanne—we started a Southern Food Institute.

**00:01:26**

**AES:** Uh—hmm. Jeanne Voltz?

**00:01:26**

**TF:** Yeah. Jeanne Voltz, and I've got—I mean I got—around Ripley I got a lot of people I know and I just do that—Jeanne Voltz. And we organized and I had a heart problem, very serious heart problem, and I couldn't go on. And we had about 146 members and so John Edge and—and oh—came up and we went and met in Jackson, Tennessee. And they told me that—what they wanted to do. And I said—but they couldn't start with—unless we got involved; I said we can just organize the charter and we can join with you. So that's how it started.

**00:02:26**

**AES:** Okay.

**00:02:26**

**TF:** So I went down there with—with Jeanne Voltz, and that's how we got started.

**00:02:31**

**AES:** So, this was—with Jeanne that was the American Southern Food Institute correct?

**00:02:36**

**TF:** Right, mm—hmm.

**00:02:36**

**AES:** Okay, and so y'all basically merged.

**00:02:38**

**TF:** Southern food. Yes, Southern food.

**00:02:40**

**AES:** Okay, so can you speak then a little bit about your experience with the American Southern Food Institute and—and what y'all did?

**00:02:47**

**TF:** All right. Well, Southern Food Institute was—we had a previous organization before that. This is the second phase. And we knew—we knew it wouldn't go, so we—we just waited for an opportune time. And all we thought, Southern Food had its own diplomacy, if you will. They have one of the great foods in America, and we—we would always be recognized for it. So, and it's more regional, so in the South we have easier to go you know to get together. Southerners are true to the South, if you will, and we started that, and—.

**00:03:49**

**AES:** What year was that?

**00:03:51**

**TF:** Oh Lord, I have no idea. We started that, and eventually we had a lot of meetings, and eventually we had to take care of Jan Shackelford. We had to fire her. She didn't like it at all, but—and for a while we was in limbo. We didn't know what to do. And I talked to Jeanne many times and Sue in what—what we're going to do next. And we—we—her health was failing. We all—both had—was in pretty bad shape. And so fortunately, this organization came along and kind of saved the day, if you will.

**00:04:49**

**AES:** But you had a—a pretty large membership and—?

**00:04:55**

**TF:** About—you know, about 146.

**00:04:57**

**AES:** Yeah, and was there programming that y'all did regularly or a—?

**00:05:03**

**TF:** Well, we had—we had about three or four meetings, and people came. It was—one was in Charleston, South Carolina. One was in Atlanta. So, people came, and we had a talk about southern food and all that kind of stuff and—and shared. But I—we needed more depth, if you will, in that we didn't have it right there.

**00:05:34**

**AES:** And so when you met with John T. Edge in Jackson, Tennessee—

**00:05:40**

**TF:** Yeah.

**00:05:40**

**AES:** —was something that you were looking forward to and welcoming a different kind of approach to—?

**00:05:47**

**TF:** No. We actually looked at it—he had to sell us what—what he was going to do.

**00:05:57**

**AES:** Right. Food—yes

**00:05:59**

**TF:** So, it's—it's not an automatic; we're not going to give it to anyone to do this unless it's—we know that they're going to take care of it. And I—and actually after the second time, I needed to go in a third time and to go flat again, you know, because it would be three times you're out literally. So, but it—what he and Egerton told sounded good. And I think Egerton really sold me in many ways because he—he was more like an extra coach if you will in a lot of ways.

**00:06:57**

**AES:** What do you think the—the problem was with the two other times that a Southern food organization tried to—?

**00:07:04**

**TF:** Well, the first one was Edna Lewis, and there was a little bit of acrimony in that she was the Queen of the South and all that kind of stuff. And as I said it caused a little acrimony in there. The second time, of course, we didn't do that much; we—we did a lot more. I got more energetic, and my heart was really good and I think we could have carried it off, but—but it

didn't happen. And we had a—we had a good representation of people, and I knew that we got some—some pushers that when we needed to, we can do some things, but it just didn't happen.

**00:08:06**

**AES:** Well, do you think that the membership from each organization has followed through to the Southern Foodways Alliance?

**00:08:12**

**TF:** Oh yes, oh yes.

**00:08:13**

**AES:** Yeah—completely?

**00:08:14**

**TF:** Not completely. Most of them though. When we—we turned our membership to Southern Food, it helped an awful lot in—in the very beginning. And we also—we had a treasury if you will, and we gave the check to Southern Food and then that helped an awful lot.

**00:08:40**

**AES:** Sure.

**00:08:42**

**TF:** At that time. And we all decided we were going to meet at Birmingham *Southern Living*, and we met and it was different people. A few—most of them I knew; a few I didn't know. And they were all—all had the same thing. We were all in southern food.

**00:09:13**

Now I started in food—well, in the early '80s I suppose. And I was—we had a Cultural Vulture—Bill and I at the *Enterprise*; we had a—a time that we can go to Europe which was very hard for two journalists in—in the newspaper business. So we took off, called the Cultural Vulture Tour, to Rome, Paris, London, the whole schmear, Switzerland, and we were gone two weeks.

**00:10:00**

Well, when I went to Paris and—and I was the—Bill was the more cultural guy and I was the gluttoner, so I picked out the restaurants. And so I went to—typical thing, Girardet and—and Tour d'Argent in Paris and all that and lo and behold I went around to Dehillerin which is a pastry—well, not just a pastry craft but pots and pans type stuff—copper pots and pans, and I maxed out the credit card and took all my cash and I bought all the pots and pans I could. And it was—at that time about \$10,000; a little bit more than that. And the Custom Agent in Memphis called me down and wanted to know what all that stuff was, brought it up, and I started a kitchen and enterprise. I ordered a Garland [brand] stove; I put a marble slab in. I put anything in—in the sun in there. And I went to Mira's and—a little later I went back to Paris; I went to Mira's and I picked all up that they had. And I went to Dehillerin again, of course, and picked up the other things. And then I saw Fred Bridge in New York, and Fred, I got really—really great—wonderfully; Fred Bridge, Bridge Kitchenware. And he told me what I needed. I got all this stuff and he told me a little—you need this, you need that, and all that kind of stuff.

**00:11:59**



So I listened to him, and I bought it. It was all there, everything you would think. At the same time, I said I need to get involved in organizations and get—and get all the magazines and everything. So we had a subscription allowance, so I got every kind of a magazine you would think, and I got a little missive in the mail saying American Institute of Wine and Food. I couldn't make the first meeting because I had a conflict with *The Enterprise*. So, the second meeting I went to Boston and Julia Child came—blip, blip, blip. Bob Mondavi had me at his table and Madeline *[inaudible]*; she was at the table, too, and Jerry Bock who wrote *The Fiddler on the Roof*. He was there; he's a great cook and Danny Kay. And I said, "Wow, that's wonderful." And Bob said—Mondavi said, "I want you to be a member of this." I said, "I don't know. I don't know that—too much about it."

**00:13:16**

See, we were just getting started. You'd be a Charter Member. I said, "Well, I'll think about it." And he told me the price, which is very, very expensive.

**00:13:27**

**AES:** I bet.

**00:13:29**

**TF:** And so I went back to Bill and I said—he said, "You want to join—join?" I said, "Okay." So I sent them a check. And Julia Child was at Boston, and she came around me and just hugged my neck. And before it's over with we got very close in lots of ways. And so I started American Institute of Wine and Food.

**00:13:53**

About two years later, Julia said, we've got a new organization called the International Association of Cooking Professionals. And so she made me a member of that. Well, at the same time when in Boston, I saw Peter Kump and he told me that James Beard, when I got back in Paris the first time, I was going to go by New York and see the great guru Beard. But he was in ill health. And—and Kump said we need to save the Beard House. So in—Bill didn't know this at the time, but on my own privy—purse I supplied the money. So, I started as a Charter Member of the James Beard House.

**00:14:57**

And at the very beginning we had just—it was stripped bare, and so Peter would call up and say we need this; we need that. So we supplied it—stemware, we can do that. I got *[inaudible]* and I said, “Do they do the china?” You call them; they'll do the china. I knew a lot of people in the industry by that time very much so.

**00:15:27**

And in about two or three years we had some meals at the *Enterprise*. Most of them were disasters. And about two years later most people really liked it. I mean and people around Ripley was talking about it and all that. And Bill printed menus and all that kind of stuff, and I started a wine cellar and all that kind of stuff. And later on it was coveted; people wanted to go to the *Enterprise*.

**00:16:05**

In the meantime, I got involved in other food organizations in America, the Chef Associations and all that—involved in CIA and all that kind of stuff. I got involved in all that. And so I—I became a foodie technically. And Southern Food is another part of that. Over the years I've accumulated cookbooks, about 17,000 in this room. And there are of course these are surpluses on kitchen equipment here, but I've got lots and lots and lots more at the *Enterprise*

and I got a warehouse full that it's full of kitchen stuff and more—more books and magazines and all that kind of stuff there.

**00:17:07**

**AES:** How did you learn to cook?

**00:17:08**

**TF:** Reading cookbooks and also I had a very great clincher. When I was in cooking, Puck was there and—and people would take me behind the scene and I would be back there behind the kitchen and learn to cook. They—they were very instructive. *[Inaudible]* in—in New York, he told me how to turn pasta. He—he was the Coach House many years ago. Babbo is with—is at the—took over the Coach House a long time ago, the Coach House *[Inaudible]* and that was a favorite of James Beard, Babbo. And one thing led to another, and here—here I am today.

**00:18:01**

I had a heart attack in '93. In '99 they told me I had to have a new heart. And about 2004 things really got really, really bad. I've died several times, and I just got out of the hospital last week. So it goes in and out, and we—we just take one day at a time. I got—I got to turn this off.

**00:18:29**

**AES:** Okay, sure. We can pause. Okay. Can we back up a little bit and talk about how you cultivated an interest in food? Your father had this grocery here, and I'm curious if that had anything to do with it.

**00:18:44**

**TF:** Nothing. My mother was a pretty bad cook. She was a southern cook. She would make good pastries. But general cook—not much; she’s learned from her grandmother and you couldn’t believe it. My career, I was in college and the Navy. I was a Navy for about 10 years, Naval Reserve and Active Duty, and they sent me to Guam. I talked—long story short, they were—in the Navy in ’68, they beckoned for people for Vietnam and all that and I wound up with the Navy, the Naval Reserve in Jackson and they shipped me off to Charleston for—and the Great Lakes and then to Charleston. And I got this idea, I’m going to Vietnam, so I signed up the wish list for Vietnam called *Patriotic* and all that kind of stuff.

**00:20:06**

Well, actually Bill and some other people in Washington and other things had the idea of sending me to Naples, Italy to be a courier, and I would go around Europe at different capitals, and I would dine and do whatever I wanted until the Vietnam passed. Politics is interesting business.

**00:20:34**

So, but by the time I got on the plane and headed for San Francisco, they dropped me off in Guam. So, I was dumped. I was going to Vietnam, but I didn’t—didn’t get there, so—so I—so in Guam, I started a Gourmet Society and we had—we only had two or three good restaurants there. And the boys would get—the sailors, we would get together once a month and each one would take the restaurant and pay for it. So it was about seven of us or seven or eight of us, and we all ate wonderfully.

**00:21:21**

And but it—that didn’t last long, about a year, because it ended up making me a good restaurant [*Laughs*]*—*so when I got out, I had this interest somewhat in food if you will. And I love to eat. And it—it—it continued somewhat. I think it’s—it’s a nurturing thing that you get

involved in and something as you progress in it, I found it fascinating—extremely fascinating. It’s everything you want—chemistry; it’s—it’s everything you want, mathematician. If you wanted to be—there are all kinds of constructs going—biologically and—and the plant life. You learn—learn about plants. You learn about the marriages of food and all that. And it got absolutely fascinating.

**00:22:34**

I talked to Julia, and I said, “This is the most fascinating stuff.” And she said—she said—she’s told me; she said, “You’ll never learn it all.” And—and she’s right; I mean it’s—it’s just absolutely fascinating.

**00:22:50**

The—Julia—we had a wonderful relationship. I would meet her, and I went to Paris with her and—and other things, but—and I was on the National Board at the American Institute of Wine and Food. And I went there a lot of times. And we had—had great meals. And ICAP, we were all going to get together and we were going to have a munch and brunch, but we called Julia Child. She was committed to a lot of things. She didn’t want—she didn’t *[inaudible]* with other people sometimes but—but she did what she had to do. And over the years, I found out a lot of interesting things, how simple things are in some ways.

**00:23:54**

Dick Graff, who was Echelon Winery, his President was Phil Woodward. And I saw Phil, and I said—he said, “You don’t know me.” And I said, “No, but I’d like to know more about you.” He told me about Echelon and all that kind of stuff, and I still get their newsletter and all that kind of stuff and wines from them. But—and Dick passed away.

**00:24:20**

But Phil is brother of Joanne Woodward, which is Paul Newman's wife—very close. So my—my good friend in Ripley's daughter, went with—at—at Wellesley College, went with Paul Newman's daughter in the same dormitory and it's that same thing. So it's all the way around. We—we said from Ripley, Tennessee, Phil Woodward and all that—big circle.

**00:25:06**

**AES:** Uh—huh. Wow—small world.

**00:25:06**

**TF:** It really is. So, the—fascinating was I went to New Jersey, and I had—Julia sometimes, she told me one Sunday afternoon and said, “Tuesday night we're going to have a meeting.” I said, “This Tuesday?” “Yeah.” I said, “Listen. I got a publication,” you know, and all that kind of stuff. “I want you to be there.” That's it.

**00:25:34**

So I—I took a plane out on Monday, went to Boston, and Tuesday night we meet—had a meeting. Wednesday, I was on the plane home. It was—it was quick. And the thing is you get in—in that relationship with people you formulate great bonds, so Julia introduced me to some other people. And—and they were a New York crowd. And that was Equitable Life Insurance and upstairs we had about 50—what we had about 75 people there, and they knew Donald Trump. See it was—it was—Leona Helmsley, she was there. It was a crème de crème of New York people.

**00:26:50**

And as I said, we had the best table. We—we was—we were hilarious on our table. And they wanted to know what we was doing, and I said, “It's a secret.” And later on I went to—I

had to go to Los Angeles and took Bill with me. And Bill went to lots of places with me. And in Los Angeles we attended the Academy of Awards, so Elizabeth Taylor was there and all that kind of stuff. So you—you get—you get through that. And then the American Institute of Wine and Food, we had a lot of problems with finances—big time with finances, so we started a wine auction. And I got involved very much so in that. And it's a success so we paid off a lot of the—what we—we owed with that. And that in turn turned into some producers in Hollywood. And from there I—I got another spiel on production and that kind of stuff and I was asked to be a walk—on actor and all that kind of stuff, which I couldn't do. I just—no more you know.

**00:28:15**

So I got involved—and we had a Chapters putting up all over the place in the American Institute of Wine and Food, so I would go to them and I learned a lot of people—Carolyn Hunt, over in Dallas. We started that over there. And I met all—all the Hunts, you know and—and Sid Bass and all that kind of crap and Trammell Crow and all that kind of stuff.

**00:28:42**

New Orleans I—I got the crème de crème, Ella Brennan, the whole smear down there and had a wonderful time in New Orleans and got lots of—Paul Prudhomme and all that and Emeril Lagasse when he was at Commanders. And—and we'd go to—went to Miami, Chicago, on and on and on.

**00:29:10**

**AES:** All this traveling, and you're—you're still rooted in small town Curve, Tennessee.

**00:29:13**

**TF:** Yeah. You can afford where you need to go, one, but the thing is my parents is here. I'm at the *Enterprise*. I'm not going to give it up. I'm not going to *[inaudible]* it. And I can do anything I want here. Why—why do I need to go anywhere you know?

**00:29:37**

**AES:** Yeah. What was it like growing up here as far as food is concerned? I know Ripley tomatoes we were talking about earlier.

**00:29:41**

**TF:** Well, that's a little bit later in '69 they started—I think it was about '69. Some people say it was '54, but it's '69 it kind of started. In the '70s it got a lot—lot better. The Ripley tomato is probably—because it's a soil and is—has a unique taste but it's very, very acid and you can actually tell in the Ripley tomato where it came from—for me—where it came from, over there or over there. It's—it's—you can actually do that. And you—you—you can also—the imitators. A few years ago somebody from *[inaudible]* *Enterprise* and they wanted a lot of—the old papers that we had at the *Enterprise*. We'd bundle them up and sell them off for packaging or whatever they needed it for. And he bought all we had. And I said what are you going to do with them? Well he's from Arkansas. He growed Arkansas tomatoes and he's going to line his baskets with Ripley tomatoes with the—with the *Enterprise* so it—it would pass off as a Ripley tomato. We got premiums on it; we'll get more money for our tomatoes.

**00:31:08**

**AES:** My goodness. That's tricky.



**00:31:11**

**TF:** Very tricky. And—and so it was—it was—we learned a lot about what a lot of people like in—in tomatoes.

**00:31:26**

**AES:** Really the shady business of tomatoes.

**00:31:29**

**TF:** Yeah, yeah. Indianapolis, we shipped—my late brother had about 235 acres and we shipped them to Indianapolis, Nashville, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama all the time and truckloads of them.

**00:31:49**

**AES:** What did you grow up eating at home?

**00:31:54**

**TF:** Well, it's my mom's food. She over cooked a lot of things. Sunday was also always, always fried chicken. There was no excuse about it. It would always be fried chicken, yeah.

**00:32:12**

And—and the wonderful thing about mother now, she made everything from scratch.

Whatever [*Beep*]—.

**00:32:26**

**AES:** Okay. So, you were talking about the food that your mother cooked growing up, fried chicken on Sundays and—.

**00:32:32**

**TF:** Yes. The—like she would do turnip greens and all that, but awfully over—cooked. And you'd have to—my father would always use vinegar, anything to mask the smell if you will. There are certain things mother would never fix like chitterlings and things like that. When we were growing up, pork or barbeque, we never used. Dad would go and get a goat at the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and that was the major thing for—for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Dad was very—Mother, we lived on a farm about a year and six months before I came to Curve. Now I'm going to back up on that a little bit, but on the farm we had fireplaces and all that. We had to chop wood. We had a well. We—we had—we had pigs and cows. We had a dairy cow just for milk. We did everything. We made butter; everything was there. We had a great garden. We had bees. We had an orchard, pond, fish—everything was there. And for a year and a half, we—I've known how to dress a pig, a cow, and all that kind of stuff and—and wring a chicken neck and all that kind of stuff.

**00:34:20**

It was great in every way. And that—and that—the foresight of my father and my mother doing that, so it helped—helped me in food somewhat. This family, the Ford family, started here in 1821 near—in Lauderdale County. Then that was just after the settlement here by the Chickasaws. My great—grandfather is buried at crossroads here and fought in the Civil War. We originally came here from Curve in the 1850s, so in a way we—we came home. So and I got the family history and all that kind of stuff. I'm the genealogist in the family. And so it's almost a full circle, so then that's another reason that I stay, yeah.

**00:35:28**

Naturally, my late brother and his—and—and his three children and his widow, they live here in Curve and this place here, they gave me—my mother gave me in her will and I said to

them, I have one older sister and I've got a twin sister which lives in Dyersburg, but I told them if anything happens, your house burns down or anything you will always have a home here. And that's true. So that's—that's what—so I stay around making sure everything is good.

**00:36:08**

**AES:** What year did the store close?

**00:36:09**

**TF:** Well, we had a session in 1993—1994 was the last—no. Sorry—about 1995—'96, I had a couple people invest—took over the store, and I had to close it because it's—it was financially unfeasible. And so I turned it into the Book Reader, as I call it, and all that. And it's—so far it's worked out pretty well.

**00:36:55**

The food that my mother—we had great fresh vegetables and all that, but unfortunately mother over—cooked everything badly.

**00:37:09**

**AES:** Talk of growing up or spending that year and a half on a farm and learning how to kill chickens and—and fix chickens and—.

**00:37:19**

**TF:** We made molasses. We had honey—the bees. I learned to rob bees and all that kind of stuff. I had beautiful pear trees. I would pick pears and peaches. And we would go down in the woods, and we'll collect firewood and—and it's—we had every—everything there. I mean when

you—there's certain things we didn't have like sugar and flour, but when we do—had flour and all that but we had chickens and all that kind of stuff. And when we had virtually what one would need. And it—it was a great revelation in a way how easy it is. Now it's very hard work. And it's something I don't recommend anybody doing but I am glad to have it.

**00:38:29**

**AES:** Yeah, sure. So from that perspective, given that perspective, how have you seen Southern food in particular change over the course of your life?

**00:38:37**

**TF:** Oh Lord, oh Lord, oh Lord. Well, it's—it's—there are—we're more urban, more and more. Women in particular don't stay at home anymore. Farms are dwindling, and it's big farms—not small farms anymore. You have a few but not that many because it's financially not—not possible. Food dramatically has changed. It's not only the fast food; it's the Wal-Mart(s) and convenience foods and all that canned food and all that kind of stuff. It's more, more, and more of that. Restaurants have changed—enormous change. They're—we call it fusion food. There is a—a—an element in restauranting, we'll do this; we'll do that. Authentic Southern food, it's not much of it.

**00:39:54**

There are slow barbeques but some of the sauces and everything else it's not true. I mean it's not Southern true. There are certain things—I'll give you a simple—a chest pie. Nothing simple. It's as simple as—but how many people make their own piecrust? They go out and get the Pillsbury. It's good—it's—there's not a thing wrong with it; it's—it's good crust but they won't make it—they won't do it. The—the cornmeal is not the same. Every 40 years corn

changes dramatically so you think you're going to eat the same things you have 50 years ago. It's not going to be there; it's all changed.

**00:40:48**

The—the range hens, if you had most chicken eggs now is fragile but they—they're grown in corn supplements and all that kind of stuff and they're not really—they're eggs but not—not what we used to have you know. There were the brown eggs from the chicken farm. It's not that much of it anymore.

**00:41:18**

The milk, extra pasteurized; we had raw milk at—at the farm. And it's a hell of a lot of difference. So—well water, wonderful water we had, its fluoridation and all that kind of stuff—nah. You know it's—it's all different and in food, one man in France taught me something wonderfully—he said, “This is wonderful.” I said it's the—he said—I said, “What is it? He said, “It's water.” Water is everything. You can make a—a good meal and you—you—you can have a different meal with a different water—simple. But it—it—it—it's a pound of meaning of what you can do with certain foods.

**00:42:22**

So, there are some people doing a lot better in certain food in some ways, but it's a long way to go, a long way to go.

**00:42:39**

**AES:** Yeah. So, given those changes in Southern food what would you say the importance of the Southern Foodways Alliance is in that context?

**00:42:50**

**TF:** Well, it can help—not necessarily it’s happening. The—we have a very small membership compared to the South, very small. What can we do? It’s—it’s almost impossible. People are not listening to us and not doing it. We—we can toot our own horn, we can talk among ourselves, but they’re not doing it with the public. It doesn’t happen that way.

**00:43:49**

The second thing, there is not a food person, me or anyone else, that goes thoroughly Southern. We’re all—I want Italian tonight. I want this tonight. It’s not going to be Southern. It’s not going to happen. I want pizza tonight, you know.

**00:44:13**

**AES:** Do you think of or see anything that can change that?

**00:44:17**

**TF:** No. You can’t. We have—we have an amalgamation of people in America that want everything instantly. And we don’t care how we get it—whether it be credit cards, anything, whatever it will take to do what we need to do. In food, like I said, in a long time ago in the ‘80s and ‘90s there was not the fast—food and all that kind of stuff and we had—and we—and—and the farms, a lot more of them, and had a few restaurants, but they were all local and the homespun cooks. It’s—it’s all much, much changed. So going back to square one is impossible. We just keep on going and make a statement—pretty well what we’re doing.

**00:45:24**

The—as you can see, you’ve got a lot of cookbooks here—in there and you’ve got a lot of Southern food—all that kind of stuff. But the thing is all these cookbooks, maybe some are authentic recipes in there, but they’re more like a reference that maybe you see it in one

restaurant; you don't see it in another—this and that. And that's they're plum. The rest of it is other things, just—even more credible.

**00:46:13**

I had a recipe for trout, something that the Arkansas River is full of—with blueberry sauce. I said you're crazy. You're crazy. You know what—you know the French will have a *[inaudible]* sauce. It's a simple brown sauce is what it amounts to. And so it's—it's—it's a guise if you will. The old—fashioned thing like catfish, deep—fried and all that kind of stuff, well there is a great thing about that; what—what—good catfish, bad catfish. Peanut oil or canola oil or corn oil or you know—yeah; it should be the back of the catfish and the front of the catfish, the underbelly of the catfish, you know.

**00:47:17**

**AES:** Well, at its inception of your involvement at the initial meeting in Birmingham, what was your personal vision for the Southern Foodways Alliance?

**00:47:30**

**TF:** Well, first of all, I was looking—seeing everybody, seeing what they wanted to do, continue with the program. The—and really get it off my hands, but I was—I had no idea what was going to happen. You know, tomorrow it will exist or whatever or I—the idea of it continuing in—in a Southern food *[inaudible]* is very important to me. But—but I had no idea how it would go; what direction it will go and all that.

**00:48:28**

The—there are—any organization you start is—is a trial and error. It—you try this; it works. It don't work then you do something else, so it's—it's a gradual thing. You can make a—

in the symposia we have a lot of people who—you know their opinions and that's what they are; they're—they're opinions but there is no formal Southern food. That—that—that kind of disturbed me; we don't have that. [*Phone Rings*]

**00:49:18**

**AES:** Do you need to get that?

**00:49:19**

**TF:** I guess.

**00:49:22**

**AES:** Okay; so back again to the Southern Foodways Alliance and the symposia you were speaking about.

**00:49:29**

**TF:** Yeah. The—there's some—some things in controversy in it and that's some of the stimulation and that's all right. But there is a—but a—a formal—what is Southern food? We really haven't discussed that. We haven't—we've skirted around it, but we really haven't told—what is the Southern food. Now we—we make a lot of generalized statements in the symposia but we have not determined it.

**00:50:17**

**AES:** What is Southern food to you?



**00:50:19**

**TF:** Well, to me it's—Southern food is from the heart—period. I'm in the South; I will give what I can to you. When you're in the South, the first thing you open the door, you help—they give you a seat and they ask you what you would like to drink. You go up North: “What do you want?” you know? The South does not do that way; we've got manners. When we get something from the heart, and we use the fresh vegetables or anything that we can muster that's from the heart.

**00:51:24**

I can give you a great example. I travel an awful lot, and I've been to Hong Kong. And I had a great guy who is in charge of mental retardation in China, in the Republic—China. And he told me a wonderful thing over lunch that he went to a small village and he heard that this child, small child had the shakes. And he didn't know who she was and all that. He went there and he gave her some pills. And she was fine; I mean she's perfect. This person was the husband—I mean, a father, saw the child and was amazed, so he went and said I want you to stay for dinner. And he said no; I can't. I've got to go do this. Please; stay for dinner. And he went and saw the child—he went and he was gone about two hours and the man was absolutely provoked. He said what happened? And finally that man came to him and he had a stringy pork belly and that was his supper for lunch. He found out, the father sold his bicycle because he was so poor and he bought the stringy pork to feed the people he said who helped his daughter. It was from the heart. And he—and he told me in China it's from the heart and that was a—wonderful meal he ever had because he gave himself something.

**00:53:46**

If you go in China, England, Northwest—Northwest America or California or Hawaii, they will consider themselves what they are—from the heart, and they will give you the things that represent them. And in the South we—what we represent is things that we—we can prepare.

**00:54:18**

Now over the years we have progressively had some things that we—we find unique. Cornbread; cornbread is found a lot of places now, but the South is pretty—cornbread here. Country ham; you've got country hams here and there *[inaudible]* and all that kind of stuff, but not like our country ham. You go into different confectionaries, like chest—pie again, pecan pie, and—and by the way, pecan pie started in the 1920s—1923; it never—that's the first recipe that's ever been published on it. So it's—it's rather new in American lexicon. It's—the first time they saw it in a menu was 1916 in New Orleans. The rest of it you know—it goes from there. And originally it wasn't made with corn syrup at all. It's—it was a brown sugar concoction, so—and until 1928 corn syrup took over and all that kind of stuff. You learn that from the South, see.

**00:55:44**

The—what we do with the different provinces in the South. I counted up 28 different cuisines in the South. See, the South is not the South in one way. You have everything from—I hate to say the soul food, plantation cookery; you have Northern Georgia, Southern Georgia, Appalachia cookery—it's different; Low Country cookery, Kentucky, burgoo and all that kind of stuff. They don't have it down here, you know. Doodle soup in Braden, Tennessee you know is different, and so—but it—.

**00:56:35**

**AES:** Do you have in your mind a meal that is the iconic Southern meal?

**00:56:43**

**TF:** Well, that's where you're from. If—if—where are you from originally?

**00:56:55**

**AES:** Originally Houston, Texas.

**00:56:57**

**TF:** Ah. If—well in your Houston, Texas that is a very large city—very large city but old Tex-Mex and all that kind of stuff, but it's depending on where you're from in one way that would make a great Southern meal. If you were in Oxford, Mississippi, and you were raised in Oxford, Mississippi, you would constitute that certain thing, that good meal. If you're Low County, that would be a good meal; Appalachian—good meal. If you gave grits say to someone in Miami that's not a good meal you know. You put a country ham in Mobile, Alabama, so what? Shrimp—they can't give you more shrimps. Oysters, you know it's—it all depends. So, there is no quote perfect *Southern* meal.

**00:58:13**

**AES:** Is there one for you?

**00:58:15**

**TF:** Not necessarily, no. There's different dishes I like in the South very much so, and I do an awful lot of cooking that—so I have a lot of things—shrimp and grits. That's a Low Country thing, and this evening I had some pickled shrimp from Pat Conroy's cookbook over in Beaufort and it's absolutely delicious. But it's where you're from, so—.

**00:59:15**

**AES:** Well, back to the Southern Foodways Alliance for a minute, how do you think it's progressed over the five—six years that it's—since it's been established?

**00:59:26**

**TF:** It's steady. It's—it's going steady and then that's—and that's good because right now because of 09/11 and a lot of things going around in the food community, Chamber House scandal, a lot—and diverse now because we've got more organizations—slow food scenarios and all kinds of stuff going on with other food organizations, we are—we're in competition in—in some ways. And people can't belong to all of them.

**01:00:11**

I'm unusual because I'm like I said a foodie apparently, so I belong to an awful—awful lot of them. But my—but because I'm very interested in all this; I'm an unusual duck. Most people have 9:00 to 5:00 jobs; they have other things—other priorities. Some like—I'm getting inclined to put out more cookbooks on this and that to which nothing—you know so it's—it's nothing there. I have a certain interest in food and that's where it is—little perfected there.

**01:01:04**

**AES:** Do you think there's anything different about the Southern Foodways Alliance that sets it apart from the pack of the other organizations?

**01:01:10**

**TF:** Well, because we're into Southern food so obviously, we're on that mend, and other people have other things and more educational chefs and all that kind of stuff. The James Beard for restaurants and all that up there in New Orleans. See, the Chef Federation Restaurants and pretty well restaurants in *[inaudible]* for chefs and all that get around and all that kind of stuff—CIA; that's the other thing up there.

**01:01:50**

Your food resources and different restaurant themes and all that—they're only empowerments in there, so—

**01:02:03**

**AES:** What about like the programming, the symposia and the field trips and—?

**01:02:07**

**TF:** That didn't hurt—didn't hurt for sure. It helps the people from Oxford, Mississippi or Arkansas, go—Biltmore or Nashville or South Carolina in finding a different food. When they go—there's a—it's not like our food, so the South is more broad—based. When you're trying—you're trying to tell what that Southern food in that area is you're trying to do that—to do that. You hit and miss sort of.

**01:02:55**

**AES:** Well, I don't—along those lines, the Southern Foodways Alliance focuses on food as culture and—.

**01:03:04**

**TF:** Culture—ah, you have a little problem with that—what kind of culture? Tell me.

**01:03:19**

**AES:** Huh, Southern culture is the umbrella but just what you're speaking to, of—of—.

**01:03:24**

**TF:** All right, I'll give—I'll give you—Athens, Georgia, they—they're—they're dress is a little bit longer, a little bit more formal. You go into Kentucky, it's wild as hell in Louisville.

Appalachia—they don't get frumped up; they don't do it. They're poor. A lot of them are very, very poor. And when you go into Charleston, South Carolina, they got an attitude in Charleston, South Carolina. If you don't know it, you'll learn. Yeah.

**01:04:03**

**AES:** Yeah. But so—but place as—food as placed in the history of a community and the people there in food bringing people together and—.

**01:04:14**

**TF:** Oh, that's fine. It—it—that always happens. Now if you're in a Jewish community, which I am a Jew, you will find when we have Passover we get everybody together. And it's a community. You get—Southern food if you want to go on that, like—minded people from the South if you will get together as a family—from the South. And if you want to call that cultural you can but it's really I don't think not there in a way. You know, a culture is a—is a long—term event that is sort of like a—I'm trying—trying to explain it. You—it's a multi—faceted thing that—almost like a pinnacle. You—you go there and—and you call this—the culture of—of

women or—or men or—or children or—but it—it—it isn't because where are you from, you know. You—you go back and you say—where are you from? I'm from Mississippi. Well, Mississippi, like the person in the next county—the little thing about Lauderdale County, people say we're really different from Ripley, Tennessee.

**01:06:27**

And from—from Crockett County, I mean, the next county over, like—you're really different. It's—it's a cultural thing if you want to call it a cultural thing. But it—it transverses more. It—it's the way you think, your process of thinking. When you think about culture it's—it's a process I suppose.

**01:07:02**

**AES:** Well, do you have any thoughts about the future of the Southern Foodways Alliance?

**01:07:08**

**TF:** I think it's in a time you know it will keep growing hopefully. It won't—it—it's going to be a job whoever will get it because it's—it's like a toy ship. It's very fragile. The right person gets it, it can do well. The wrong person gets it for a few years—**[Gestures]**. The—you can—we old cultures will die off, 50—don't mean anything. Every day another one will keel over, you know. That's not the point. Whether other people will be interested in what we do, I don't know. I can't speak for other people.

**01:08:21**

**AES:** Are there any projects that you'd like to see or topics discussed in the near future?

**01:08:31**

**TF:** Well, I think one thing we need to get a little bit more serious on—on food in the South of going to—where that specialty is. Now there are about five locations of tomatoes in the South. There are two watermelon festivals in the South. Kudzu festival; we have a kudzu festival, and they make beer. You ought to try that. Country hams, we have about three country hams, slews of barbeque places for spin—offs on barbeque; shrimp festivals and oyster festivals by the dozens. Crawfish Festivals—three; at least three and maybe more—crawfish festivals. They have a Biscuit Festival, Pie Festival; you can go a particular place and you can go and find what they really like and you—you get a taste, just a taste. And we don't do that as much as we should.

**01:10:10**

Anybody with any travel experience when you go to New Orleans and the Creole and Cajun food, they immediately pick up on it. Low Country—they'll pick up on it in Charleston and Savannah and all that kind of stuff. Appalachia, the same way; but there is particular—like leeks over in North Carolina; they have a leek festival. It's unique—leeks—no, not leeks but ramps—sorry, ramps—ramps. So you go there and you take—ramps. And you—and you cook it in the Appalachia style where it came from and not—and gussied up in a restaurant, they say I use ramps here and ramps there you know and that doesn't quite get it.

**01:11:07**

**AES:** A little immersion in local—?

**01:11:11**

**TF:** Yes, yes, yeah, yeah. There's—there's a lot of chicken festivals and all that because they raise a lot of chickens in certain places. There's—anything else?



**01:11:41**

**AES:** Well, no. If there's something you'd like to end on or a final thought about the organization?

**01:11:46**

**TF:** No.

**01:11:46**

**AES:** I think we've covered everything.

**01:11:48**

**TF:** All right. Let's eat.

**01:11:49**

**AES:** Okay. You want to tell the record what we're having for our lovely lunch here since you prepared it?

**01:11:54**

**TF:** Well, we'll have pickled shrimp. We'll have saffron rice with chicken potpie, a salad with fresh raspberries and raspberry pecan vinaigrette and strawberry shortcake and our chocolate—dark gingerbread chocolate cake with ice—cream and whipped cream.

**01:12:27**

**AES:** Oh, well, I'm going to be too full—.

**01:12:28**

**[End Terry Ford Interview]**