

TRISH BERRY
Catering Chef, Ground Zero & Madidi Restaurants
Clarksdale, MS

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Date: August 19, 2005
Location: Ground Zero – Clarksdale, MS
Length: 6 minutes, 9 seconds
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Project: MS Delta Hot Tamale Trail

NOTE: This interview occurred in Ground Zero's main dining room during regular service, so customers can be heard talking and playing pool in the background.

[Begin Trish Berry]

0:00:00.1

Amy Evans: This is Friday, August nineteenth, 2005. This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm in Clarksdale, Mississippi, at Ground Zero Blues Club and Restaurant with Trish Berry, the Chef at both Madidi and Ground Zero. Is that correct, Trish?

0:00:16.0

Trish Berry: I'm the Pastry Chef and Catering Chef and all this stuff at Madidi.

0:00:20.9

AE: Okay. Would you say your name for the record?

0:00:22.3

TB: Trish Berry.

0:00:23.3

AE: And your birth date, if you share that kind of information.

0:00:25.9

TB: I wouldn't even think about it. It's July fourteenth every year. *[Laughs]*

0:00:28.0

AE: *[Laughs]* Okay. And so we have before us an assortment of hot tamales --two different hot tamales—regular hot tamales and then--

0:00:33.9

TB: Uh-hmm, two different kinds.

0:00:34.7

AE: --the fried.

0:00:36.4

TB: We call these served Delta-style, which are just regular corn shuck-wrapped tamales, made by a man in—the little corn silks are everywhere--made by a man in Cleveland [Mississippi], who would like to remain nameless for some reason. These are some of the best tamales around here, and I've tried them all, trying to see which kind to carry. This is a different brand [the fried] that we--anyway, let--let me stick with the Deltas. They--we just serve them steamed kind of in their own brine he gives you--he gives us a little chili powder and salt and garlic powder mix to put in the water, and we just cook them real slow. But we make sure that they're steamed really good because if the masa that's around them is not steamed good, then they're tough and gummy and, you know, and not like they're intended to be. But these are cooked good, and they're tender and puffed up and ready to go.

0:01:35.0

AE: Does he give them to you frozen?

0:01:36.6

TB: Uh-hmm, I get them from him frozen.

0:01:38.9

AE: Okay. And then he gives you all the accessories [spices] to then steam them with?

0:01:41.8

TB: Uh-hmm. And these are the fried [tamales]. These come from Texas, and they're by a company called Gebhart, G-e-b-h-a-r-t. They're somewhere in Texas, and I've used these to fry for years. They're a little bit spicier and seem to not lose a lot of flavor when you do batter them and deep fry them. So they hold up real well.

0:02:00.8

AE: So that was your idea to put the fried ones on the menu here?

0:02:03.1

TB: Uh-hmm.

0:02:04.8

AE: And how did you get that idea?

0:02:06.9

TB: Well the menu just needed some tweaking. That's why I was lucky enough to be sent down here, and so I've changed the whole menu up and these things. They already had some hot tamales on the menu--not these, but I ran across these and they were good so--.

0:02:22.7

AE: Are you from the Delta originally?

0:02:24.6

TB: I grew up in Vicksburg [Mississippi], went to Ole Miss [the University of Mississippi], live in Indianola [Mississippi].

0:02:27.7

AE: Okay. And so there's--there are tamales in Vicksburg that are quite famous, Solly's.

0:02:32.7

TB: Solly's, um-hmm.

0:02:32.2

AE: And Fat Mama's, I think, is the other one?

0:02:34.5

TB: That's in Natchez.

0:02:35.9

AE: Natchez, okay. Close to Vicksburg.

0:02:37.8

TB: [The tamales] almost as good as her margaritas! [*Laughs*]

0:02:41.8

AE: [*Laughs*] So are there--is there much of a difference between the hot tamales down there to up here that you can tell?

0:02:45.5

TB: Everybody's--everybody's are just a little bit different. I made some in culinary school [at Memphis Culinary Academy] that had raisins in them [*Chokes, jokingly*] which should be, you know, against the law, but it was a very authentic Mexican recipe.

0:02:58.2

AE: Uh-hmm, and what is it about tamales in the Delta in this region, specifically, that it's—it's a specific kind of tamale? How do you think that happened?

0:03:05.0

TB: I have no idea. That is a *very* good question. I'm hoping that's something that I'll read in your story when you get through writing it. I think that's--you do have to wonder. I don't think Mex--I don't think tamales are actually Mexican. They're probably Texican, and we just adapted them. And how they ended up in the Mississippi Delta, I don't know, but they are everywhere.

0:03:24.9

AE: Have you ever made them by hand yourself?

0:03:26.3

TB: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

0:03:25.7

AE: Well, you said you made them in culinary school. So what do you think about the process of making them and all that's required and the labor and the--the time that goes into it, and the people who are still doing it?

0:03:35.5

TB: I'm very happy that the man in Cleveland makes such good ones--a lot of trouble.

0:03:42.4

[Interruption]

Female bartender: Can you keep your eye on the bar? We're going to do that promo deal.

TB: Okay.

0:03:50.2

AE: You would never consider making them in a restaurant where you work.

0:03:55.0

TB: Well, under certain circumstances maybe, you know, if it was like a--a Fat Mama's situation where that was one of the only things you're going to have and specialize in, yeah.

0:04:04.4

AE: Uh-hmm. And so what is it that's different between the ones that you buy from Texas to fry and the ones that you get from Cleveland? Why is that? Why do you have to get two different ones?

0:04:12.5

TB: Well you'll just have to taste--the ones that we get that are in the shucks and everything are--just seem to be more tender to begin with [from Cleveland, Mississippi]. And this is a lot sturdier tamale [from Texas] and with a whole lot--just a completely different flavor but it's, you know, really spicy, not so hot, but really spicy. It just seems to--the flavor comes through--even through battering and frying. And this [the tamale from Cleveland, Mississippi] might be just a little more--a *little* more subtle flavor than that.

0:04:39.5

AE: Have you had fried tamales anywhere else?

0:04:41.8

TB: I have not.

0:04:45.1

AE: They have some at the Bourbon Mall in Bourbon--.

0:04:47.4

TB: Okay. Well, see, I used to have a restaurant in Indianola [which is just up the road from Bourbon, Mississippi], and I started doing them then, I think the Bourbon Mall started doing them, sometime all around the same time.

0:04:55.4

AE: But you have yours in your nice bite-size pieces; it makes for good bar food.

0:04:57.7

TB: Yeah, yeah.

0:04:57.9

AE: Do you sell a lot of these late at night?

0:04:59.8

TB: A lot--a lot. We probably sell more fried than regular.

0:05:03.4

AE: Really?

0:05:04.1

TB: Uh-hmm.

0:05:05.8

AE: Do a lot of people--because Clarksdale is such a tourist town, do a lot of people come in and have no idea of what to think about this?

0:05:11.8

TB: Oh, yeah. They have--you know, and the wait staff loves them, and so they recommend them. So people just, you know--who would have ever thought of frying a hot tamale? I mean, you know, we fry everything down here, so why not a hot tamale.

0:05:23.2

AE: Do you like eating them yourself?

0:05:24.5

TB: I have eaten several. *[Laughs]* I've eaten several.

0:05:29.4

AE: All right. Well we'll have our little taste test here. Do you have any parting words about the history of tamales in the Delta or--?

0:05:35.1

TB: I do not. I would just like--

0:05:36.3

AE: How you like to eat them.

0:05:39.7

TB: Usually when the weather is a little cooler. But these are good any time--the fried.

0:05:44.2

AE: Do you have in the Delta a place that you like to always stop and get them when you're on the road going somewhere or going to Indianola?

0:05:51.3

TB: I stop in Cleveland and buy these from this man there. I don't know why he doesn't want his name used, but far be it for me.

0:06:01.9

AE: Got enough business. [*Laughs*]

0:06:02.7

TB: [*Laughs*] Uh-hmm. I guess he does--maybe he does.

0:06:04.2

AE: [*Laughs*] Well that would be good. All right. Well thank you, ma'am.

0:06:07.6

TB: Taste away.

0:06:07.8

AE: All right.

0:06:09.0

[End Trish Berry]