Camille Boudreaux
Killer Poboys – New Orleans, LA
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Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Audio Engineer: Thomas Walsh
Transcription: Debbie Mitchum
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Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Wednesday, April 22, 2015. I'm in a courtyard in the French Quarter with the proprietor of Killer Poboys, which exists on Conti Street. And if I could ask you to say your full name and tell us in your words what you do for a living, we'll get started.

[00:00:24]

Camille Boudreaux: My name is Camille Boudreaux. I am the chef/owner of Killer Poboys in the back of the Erin Rose Bar on Conti Street in the French Quarter, New Orleans.

[00:00:33]

SR: Thank you. And could you please tell us your birth date and where you were born and raised?

[00:00:39]

CB: My birth date is August 1, 1980 and I was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana.

[00:00:45]

SR: Thanks. The name Boudreaux isn't necessarily New Orleanian. Do you have some heritage in other parts of the state?

[00:00:53]

CB: I do. My family name comes from Lafourche Parish and Golden Meadow, but I'm very much a city boy. And I really do not know the Boudreaux side of the family, so I've claimed all Boudreauxs in the whole state now as my own, and there's a lot of us. It's like the Smith of southern Louisiana, right?

[00:01:10]

SR: So your dad's family was from Golden Meadow?

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[00:01:14]

CB: Yeah, mm hmm, definitely.

[00:01:16]

SR: What about your mom's?

[00:01:17]

CB: My mother's side of the family—. My mom grew up around Baton Rouge and they moved around a lot, but both my parents are from south Louisiana [and have] generally lived their lives in the New Orleans area, so—. Went to McDonogh 15 down here in the French Quarter for elementary school, and I went to De La Salle High School, and then I went back to McDonogh 16 to get my high school diploma when I got kicked out of Catholic high school. [*Laughs*]

[00:01:43]

SR: What part of the city did you grow up in?

[00:01:46]

CB: As a young man I lived in the French Quarter, and then in high school years lived Uptown, right off the parade route on Seventh Street.

[00:01:54]

SR: What part of the Quarter did you live in?

[00:01:56]

CB: When we were little we lived about the 300 block of Dauphine Street. Then I think we lived on Ursulines Street, and we lived on Ursulines Street up until I was about ten or so, and then we moved uptown.

[00:02:10]

SR: That's really interesting, because if you were born in '80, that wasn't necessarily the height of, I don't know, when real people lived in the Quarter. You know, it was already starting to diminish a little bit. What did your parents do for a living, or where did they work, that you lived down here?

[00:02:27]

CB: My father used to have a gallery on Royal Street, and he dealt in modern primitive Southern folk art most of his life, as I've known him. He was a criminal defense attorney with offices in four parishes before I was born and then quit that whole ride to be an artist. He was reborn as an artist.

[00:02:46]

SR: Very interesting. Is he still alive?

[00:02:51]

CB: He is still alive, yes. St. James Boudreaux is the artist name.

[00:02:55]

SR: Thank you. Then, she's not here right now, but could you tell us kind of some—you know, summarize some similar information about your partner in business and life?

[00:03:08]

CB: Oh, definitely. So my lovely wife, who is absent from this interview due to a virus affecting her throat and her ability to talk [*Laughs*] and be comfortable being seen right now, is my partner in crime, life, and business, and she is the co-owner and the other force behind our little po-boy shop, Killer Poboys. Her name is April Bellow. She was born in the early '80s as well, and she grew up in Gretna and lived in New Orleans pretty much since then. But we both spent a little time in the Northeast professionally in our twenties.

[00:03:45]

SR: Can you tell us a little bit about how you met and, for the record, whether you both cook—or does one of you cook and one manage the place? Or how do you split up your duties?

[00:04:00]

CB: So April is actually a chef as well, and we collaborate on almost everything. We met in a kitchen in the late '90s when we both worked at Arnaud's Restaurant on Bienville Street, and we rekindled—. We had nothing back then, but what we have, it came to be in about 2010 when I moved back into town and we kind of reconnected as friends first and then, you know, as romantic partners later, and then business partners as well. April's got a strong culinary background. She's a graduate of Johnson and Wales University. She's worked in a lot of different environments. I think the job she's most proud of is she was the first female sous-chef at Arnaud's, which is quite an accomplishment for an old-line Creole restaurant to be considered to be management with the genes that she—you know, because there's still a lot of misogyny in the cooking world. I would say that I play a little bit more of the chef role in some regards, but we consider every aspect of the culinary arts in the po-boys—gets kind of thrown back and forth. So the idea was *ours* to do the sandwiches in the bar. She had been working at the bar actually. She stopped cooking professionally and was doing catering on the side and was a bartender, which leads to the story of why we're in the Erin Rose. I don't know if you want to go there now. Yeah?

[00:05:24]

SR: Sure.

[00:05:25]

CB: So our awesome—. This is a long story.

[00:05:30]

SR: That's good. Go for it.

[00:05:32]

CB: All right. So, the Erin Rose Bar, formerly Monaghan's Erin Rose, was founded by Jim Monaghan, who was a notorious proprietor of French Quarter bars and at one time, I think, owned more than twelve or thirteen bars in the French Quarter. And his flagship is Molly's. Molly's got its name—that was the dog. When he sold his interest in one business to open the bar, the ex-partner, I think, told him, "You're never going to succeed." So he named the bar after the dude's dog, or something. I can't remember the whole story, but he's kind of a legendary figure down here in French Quarter nightlife, and politics, and literature, and journalism. So, on his death, he actually bequeathed the Erin Rose Bar to its current landlords, Tory and Angie Koehlar, who were both long-term employees of his. Troy had been a chef and he dropped out of working in kitchens to do bar management, and Angie grew up here in the French Quarter and had been working in bars because she grew up in one and that was the natural thing to do.

So, they offered us the space to use because they had been running their own food operation there. They had a robotic fryer that would—. You put frozen tater tots in one end and, like, it poops them out this little chute and the bartender would go back there. So for a couple years they had like tater tots and cheese sticks. But the bar has a long history of different food concepts in it, and actually Juan's Flying Burrito, which is a multi-unit kind of local chain of Tex-Mex food—I'm pretty sure the legend is they started the whole brand back in that kitchen back there in the mid-ish '90s, and they weren't there for very long. I think they used that to bootstrap the Lower Garden location, which has been enormously successful for them.

Then there was a noodle bar; a guy did like kind of Pan-Asian noodles. He had like a pad thai, he had a pho. That was there for a couple years, and that was really cool, but people really weren't like doing the hidden-eats thing. Foodie-ism was very nascent, and there had been more of a blackened alligator bite, you know, whatever—like a fried this or that kitchen—there. And there was a little Greek kitchen there for a little while. And then after [Hurricane] Katrina [in 2005], my landlord kind of redid the space and was tired of dealing with outside entities being a chef in the space, so I think he saw the value in getting somebody back there doing handmade food again and offered us the space and we literally—. I quit my job. I had been the sous-chef at the Green Goddess there on Exchange Place, and I was like, "All right, let's do it."

We looked at a couple different things, and I had this po-boy idea for years and years and years. Internationally inspired, chef-crafted, New Orleans-style sandwiches. Which is our mission. That's what we do. So it just kind of evolved from then, and we had all kinds of bigger and smaller ideas about what to do back there, but it just started taking its course and now we are where we are. Yeah.

[00:08:36]

SR: When was that, that you opened?

[00:08:39]

CB: We opened in 2012 right around St. Patrick's Day, and that was the first time a Killer Poboy had ever been sold. Actually, during Mardi Gras we had gumbo and whatnot at the Erin Rose Bar, and that was kind of testing the grounds for whether we would be all right in the bar, and we really kind of built a kitchen since then. I mean, before it was one person, a one-man show. For six months I was Killer Poboys. My wife and business partner was working five days a week at the bar as a bartender, and she would come and give me a break. I would come in at

9:00 in the morning, do all the prep, and leave for an hour and a half and then come back and do it all night, you know. At a point we needed an employee, and then a couple weeks later we needed three employees. And in 2014, 40,000 sandwiches out of that little kitchen. Yeah. So it's been one hell of a ride, I'll say that. Yeah.

[00:09:35]

SR: There are a lot of questions I have out of that.

[00:09:39]

CB: Go ahead.

[00:09:41]

SR: Let's start with this one. So—. Well, let me start with this: What were some of the other ideas you had to do there, besides po-boys?

[00:09:51]

CB: Well, I mean some of the other ideas were other, like, food-to-eat-with-your-hand tropes. Tacos, or maybe even something a little wilder. We both love Vietnamese food. We both grew up eating Vietnamese food, which is what you do when you're in New Orleans. You go to the West Bank, or [New Orleans] East, or increasingly in the city limits, and eat great Vietnamese food, because that's one of the joys of living in South Louisiana. So we had also thought about doing just bánh mì with some of the vermicelli salad bowls and maybe some fresh spring rolls and stuff like that, and we didn't know how people would accept two non-Vietnamese chefs doing pretty much standard Vietnamese fare.

The sandwich idea stuck, and we knew we wouldn't be happy buying iceberg lettuce, doing the "dressed" format. It just wasn't us. I hate to buy crappy tomatoes, and I don't want to have them just because a guest thinks that they need to see a tomato on their sandwich, or

whatever the whole industry of shitty tomatoes is. So we started messing around with—. I think, really, like the idea to make the fusion sandwiches, or the internationally inspired sandwiches, was going to eat at Pho Tau Bay and Tan Dinh and places out there on the West Bank and seeing, like, before any white dude ever uttered the word "bánh mì," the sandwiches would have the Vietnamese script that I can't read and then "/Vietnamese Po-Boys." So I thought that was, like, what a great extension for the story of sandwich in New Orleans to kind of take the form and bring some great local ingredients in there with some international flare. I mean we love international cuisines, we love eating out ethnic food or what have you, and I think that I've just kind of noticed world cuisines. My whole life I've been just interested, and I haven't been able to travel, but I've been able to taste what makes food spicy in Indonesia, or what the idea of the deeper meaning behind like a dish in Eastern Europe or something like that is, from reading and talking to people who are familiar with the cuisine. And eating it, you know.

[00:12:15]

[So those] were the two guidelines. We didn't want to deal with crappy food—we didn't want to buy shitty products—and we didn't want to do what everybody else was doing. I saw no distinction in doing that. Even if we had failed, Killer Poboys wouldn't have turned into a roast beef, dressed; ham and Swiss, dressed; or fried shrimp po-boy, dressed. You know. It just coalesced. I mean I think that the Killer Poboys idea kind of took root before anything else even got too well planned out. But we did: we looked at tacos. We looked at some other, you know, stuff to eat with your hands in a bar.

[00:12:54]

SR: It makes so much sense to me now. I mean, now that you exist and now that we're in New Orleans in 2015. But even three years ago it was pretty out there to choose one of the most

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traditional, un-messed-with New Orleans foods and decide to have that be the inspiration for something that's so worldly, you know? Were you nervous at all about messing with tradition, or were we already at a point in the city where that felt pretty comfortable?

[00:13:33]

CB: I was very nervous. Some main points of distinction: we do buy bread from a Vietnamese bakery. We don't use the traditional New Orleans bakeries, and most of the brands are owned by one bakery now anyway. And there's a couple of reasons for why we don't use the Leidenheimer bread or the Binder bread. So I was worried that some people that were considered to be authorities in food would trash us for that. But I was ready with my po-boy pedigree, which is that I grew up in New Orleans, right, and a lot of people that write about food didn't, so I figured that could be the last—if I needed to pierce the veil on somebody's, you know, crap. But nobody ever really brought it to that level to discuss whether we were authentic or inauthentic, and then I talked to—. I seriously talked to a lot of New Orleanians in their fifties, sixties, and seventies who can remember when a po-boy shop didn't have an Italian-American specialty on it, and that was new school back in the day.

[00:14:31]

Also, I really consider the sandwich to be this quintessentially American thing, where you take the things of the past from where you're from, and you put them together in a new format, and then you rush off to make your name in America with a handheld meal that you don't have to stop to eat. And I really kind of saw that we could take that story of the sandwich and bring it to a lot of places. And it's been a lot of places, what we've done with it, as far as like having influences from almost all over the world. We shop at the Asian markets, we shop at the Indian market for spices and condiments and stuff like that. We're always kind of on the look for

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another great local product as well, as far as meat, seafood, and produce, to slip in to the menu if it makes sense. So that's really been our inspiration—I think less so not being iconoclastic about it, but more just making great sandwiches that fit into our mission of having the internationally-inspired, New Orleans-style sandwiches. And I think that we still—. I think that in the world of sandwichery there is some composition that occurs in different stages. Like a French baguette sandwich is going to be not a whole lot of ingredients, but they're balanced: butter and ham, you know, or goat cheese and jam. And I feel like maybe some of the deeper parameters of a po-boy would imply that they're a little messy; they feel kind of heavy in your hand. I felt like there was a certain aesthetic we could still match without "dressed"; without, you know, a fourteen-inch sandwich; without a lot of the things that traditional po-boy shops do.

[00:16:23]

SR: Well I think that answers—. It pretty well starts to answer the question I had, like why—? I mean, I like the name "Killer Poboys," and it makes sense to me that that's what your place is named, but you didn't choose "Killer Sandwiches." You chose "Killer Poboys," and I was wondering if that's because you're from here and a po-boy is how you relate—you know, like the po-boy was your first sandwich? Or is it because there is some aesthetic of a po-boy that you keep in mind when you're creating the five or six that you have on your menu every day?

[00:17:02]

CB: Yeah. Well, definitely. I mean, my language to talk sandwiches, you know, at this point, is po-boys, and we just—. Yeah, I don't know. We didn't really—. We talked about maybe doing like a bunch of different crazy sandwiches. You know, kind of like Cochon Butcher, which has an extensive sandwich menu, which kind of goes all over the sandwich tropes: cold sandwiches, hot sandwiches. I think that what unifies them is probably their

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housemade—house charcuterie program that goes on a lot of those products. But po-boys just stuck, and we tried with the bigger loaves of bread. We're so small, and the traditional New Orleans po-boy loaf is twenty-eight inches. You have to have somewhere secure to put a twenty-eight-inch loaf. It droops, it bends, you can't leave it upright, you know, and they just weren't—. It really wasn't like working with the new school garnishes and sauces, so we switched to Dong Phuong Bakery out in New Orleans East, who I think make the bánh mì loaf that is inspired by New Orleans French bread. There seems to be a lot of variety in the bánh mì loaf, and that one really made sense to us, so we stuck with that product and we went with more of an individual-sized eight-inch loaf, and that's what we've used since then.

[00:18:15]

But, yeah, I wouldn't consider doing anything else besides po-boys. I mean we do have one grilled cheese on our menu that's made with Irish whiskey, and it's not a po-boy. It's the Drunken Grilled Cheese. But other than that, yeah. I mean, I don't think we would have conceived of doing anything that was a sandwich other than a po-boy. Yeah.

[00:18:32]

SR: Could you—for people who might be listening to this or reading this who aren't familiar with New Orleans po-boys, could you kind of describe what we think of right now as the traditional New Orleans po-boy bread, and how the bánh mì bread is different, and why you chose the bánh mì loaf that you chose?

[00:18:55]

CB: Sure. So the traditional New Orleans po-boy loaf, the long form, is that I think an enterprising baker built a big oven and—. Are you going to like go over the whole long-form po-boy history, the nomenclature, the naming? Are you going to do that, or—?

[00:19:17]

SR: Please talk about whatever you think is—. Yeah. I mean, the short answer is yes, in an introduction, but it's possible that people won't read it.

[00:19:29]

CB: Okay.

[00:19:30]

SR: And they'll hear or listen to your interview. So feel free to repeat anything I might write.

[00:19:34]

CB: Yeah, great. So, like, big sandwiches have been eaten in New Orleans before they were called "po-boys." And from my understanding, a lot of times they were called "loaves" and sometimes they were in a cap bread, which is a traditional New Orleans style of French bread per se. Sometimes they were in more of a buttery loaf, like a brioche or a white bread loaf, and sometimes they were in an elongated baguette-size French bread. The term was coined by some ex-streetcar operators who had a little corner store, and for their striking brethren they were giving free sandwiches to the "poor boys" on the strike line, or something like that. And in the vernacular, the Yat vernacular, the word "po-boy" stuck, spelled p-o-o-r boy to some people, spelled differently to other people. It's all very confusing, very mysterious, and so utterly New Orleans.

[00:20:24]

A couple years after that, as far as I know, an enterprising baker—and I think it was Binder Bakery—built an oven to make a longer loaf for a variety—. I've heard the lore was that some places used to cut the tips off the loaf and they wanted to get more usage out of the bread

and lose only a little bit of tips. I think it was probably a marketing ploy by somebody to have the biggest sandwich for sale on the block or whatever. And the twenty-eight-inch loaf kind of stuck, and that's de rigueur for most po-boy shops in greater New Orleans, if not the whole Gulf South, to use a longer French bread loaf that's close to that two-feet-and-some-change, or whatever. We went a whole other direction, and we just saw value in using the bánh mì loaf. It stands the test of time for a long service. It stays fresher longer, and it was much easier to cart around than the big, long loaves.

[00:21:30]

The owners of the company are very industrious and will come deliver to you for almost nothing, too. [*Laughs*] That was another good thing. They were happy to work with a small business. I think they're great. They've been there for many, many years, and they're a great story of some people who kind of escaped an awful situation in their home country to rebuild their lives in Louisiana and have done so successfully. As far as I know the husband of the family adapted some of his wife's family's recipes and opened up a shack that had bread and some pastries, and then every couple years they've expanded it and now have a wholesale division, which we use. They have a huge bakery in a very forlorn part of the city that no tourist ever goes to, really, and then they have a restaurant and a sandwich shop there too. So, yeah, it just made sense for us, and we would never go back now. We're happy with the product. We're happy to put it on what it is and kind of create a new language to speak the po-boy song—or, you know, sing it.

[00:22:37]

SR: Do you find the actual bread, like the crumb, different between the bánh mì and the traditional New Orleans loaf?

[00:22:46]

CB: I do, but I will say with the caveat that I've had so many different styles of bánh mì loaves in different parts of the country that I would not venture to be an arbiter of what is and what would make a bánh mì loaf. There's a bakery on the West Bank called Hi-Do Bakery. They make an extremely—. It's very fluffy and spongy. Dong Phuong's bánh mì is crisper and has a little bit more of the snap and crackle on the crust, and the crumb is definitely—. It's not denser per se, but the traditional New Orleans po-boy loaves start their day being very crisp, and then they kind of weep and get a softer texture, and I've always felt that New Orleans po-boy bread works best in your fried seafood sandwiches because you kind of take this airy structure on the outside and squeeze some more kind of fried, airy stuff on the inside and the symbiosis makes a whole—. I love roast beef po-boys. I would venture to say that the style of a long sandwich just makes the roast beef po-boy a little messier to eat, you know. I don't know if a bun would be less messy—which is part of the fun, you know. Old-timers say, "elbow dripper," like, "You need to get an elbow dripper." If it's dripping down to your elbows you're doing something right, I guess, is what the general consensus is for the roast beef po-boy. But, yeah, I wouldn't say anything's better or worse. It's just what we do, and that works for us.

[00:24:21]

SR: Where do you stand on the "po-boy" versus "poor boy" pronunciation?

[00:24:28]

CB: I say "po-boy." I know other people that—. I don't know a whole lot of people that say "poor boy." I have heard it before, you know from a Yat speaker that said "mynez" right before it too, so I think there is a place for that term. I mean we spell— Professionally we're branded as p-o-b-o-y with no hyphen or anything. It just kind of happened. When I close my

eyes and you say the word "po-boy," that's how I spell it. So I don't think there's a whole lot of rules. There might be one or two or a small handful of people that would espouse there to be rules. I think Tom Fitzmorris or somebody that does food media in New Orleans that's from here has an opinion about the spelling and pronunciation, but I can't remember what it is. And it seems to matter little to my guests because most of the guests in the French Quarter, they'll know what a po-boy is anyway, and most people in New Orleans couldn't explain to you what makes a po-boy a po-boy once you start dissecting their arguments for dressed, or meatball, or roast beef, or fried shrimp, so, yeah.

[00:25:43]

SR: Yeah, there are old-timers who just think it's sacrilege to say "po-boy," but it's a small contingent, I think. We've been sort of dancing around the sandwiches and talking about sort of your philosophy, but we haven't talked specifics. Can you give us a few of your bestsellers?

[00:26:10]

CB: Sure.

[00:26:11]

SR: Well, let me first say, your menu changes.

[00:26:13]

CB: Mm hmm.

[00:26:13]

SR: How frequently does it change, and do you have any sandwiches that always stay on? Maybe you could start with those?

[00:26:20]

CB: Okay, so as far as the menu goes, I would say that now that we're super busy and we have a lot of word-of-mouth business we haven't really been changing the menu up a lot at the actual small po-boy operation in the Erin Rose Bar. I hope to expand and have a larger menu and move stuff back and forth between spaces, but that's neither here nor there. But I will kind of outline that when we first opened the business, in the first year we probably changed—a complete makeover of the menu—four times in six months, which I didn't have anybody to—. It was just me, so it was fine, you know, and the busier we've gotten the harder it is to change. Every time, if I want to change something, it not only destroys some guests' expectations of what they thought they were going to get when they come in, but it needs to be translated to four, five, or six people, so things get refined more than they get changed at this point.

[00:27:13]

Our lifetime biggest seller, the thing that would never come off the menu at Killer Poboys in the Erin Rose Bar, would be the seared shrimp po-boy. We take big, beautiful Gulf shrimp that we get in-house every day, peel and devein and caress with care. We buy them fresh from the lake when it's in season. If there's people going out, day boats in the Gulf, we buy that, and when the rain comes we buy from the guys that are out in the Gulf for a couple weeks or so. But it's wild-caught Gulf shrimp. I've never bought anything else for the store. I don't see why anybody in Louisiana would buy any other shrimp than Gulf shrimp. It makes no sense to me, because it's right there in our backyard and you support the local fishermen, which is great, especially after all the crap they've been through down here.

[00:28:04]

So, the seared Gulf shrimp po-boy. The shrimp get rubbed down with a little spice made from coriander and lime. This is totally my wife's thing, this is her spice, so coriander and lime

salt that we would make for—. I think she started making this spice to do fish tacos for a catering project and it was a simple, very awesome spice, and it went onto the shrimp. It stuck. We sear all the shrimp in a cast-iron skillet. It's served with a savory sauce, a little homemade mayonnaise mixed with sriracha, lime, and a secret ingredient: ground Louisiana dried shrimp. We grind it up into a powder and put a little bit in there. You'd never know it was in there. I don't tell a lot of people about it. If they have a shrimp allergy, they're probably not buying the shrimp sandwich—hopefully not. But it is just a little bit of umami savory-ness that lives in the background. And that's another thing from my wife: she loves fishy stuff. We love the dried shrimp. We snack on the dried shrimp all the time.

[00:29:07]

There's a whole other story behind the dried shrimp, and I can get to that, because I'm going to ramble, but then the rest of the sandwich is a big fistful of mixed herbs. Whatever we can get, whatever we grow: green onions, mint, cilantro, sometimes some Thai basil in there. Sometimes we'll get wacky shit, like Vietnamese mint. I can't pronounce the Vietnamese name so please don't hold me to it. It's really not mint, but it's got this awesome like camphor/basil kind of thing going on. Sometimes garlic chives. We try to grow a lot of herbs. We take the green onion bottoms back and put them in some dirt and grow more green onions—whatever. And the last ingredient is—and this sandwich is very much inspired by the bánh mì, or the idea of the Vietnamese po-boy—we make a little vegetable relish of carrot, daikon radish, and cucumber, and it's mixed in with a Vietnamese condiment called nuoc mam that my wife learned from a lady that worked at Arnaud's. They have a lot of Vietnamese ladies that are in there in the morning—peeling shrimp, polishing the glasses—and she became friends with one of them and was transmitted a lot of secret knowledge and ideation and technique behind some of these

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Vietnamese preparations. So the sauce, and then unfortunately—. Oh, God. What's her name? Unfortunately the woman died a kind of tragic, violent death, so in memoriam to her we kind of ensconced her sauce to our sandwich shop.

[00:30:38]

So the whole sandwich in its entirety is seared shrimp, a savory sauce, a lot of herbs, and marinated vegetables. The vegetables are marinated in a mix of garlic, fish sauce, two different vinegars, two different citrus juices, and chili paste, and the recipe did come from a true Vietnamese cook to my wife. We've modified it a slight bit over time but the technique—you know, she says you got to chop the garlic up with the sugar, then add this, then add that, and there's reasons for doing that and I've forgotten some of them, but we still do it the way it's supposed to be done. So it's a minor thing, a minor detail. To the guests it means nothing; it's just the sauce on their garnish, but it does have a little bit of a story, as most chefs' food does. That is our all-time biggest seller. We sell so much shrimp. I mean I don't even know how we peel and cook all the shrimp there. We have one cast-iron pan we do it all in.

[00:31:28]

SR: You peel all the shrimp?

[00:31:30]

CB: Mm hmm, we peel all the shrimp. We buy the biggest shrimp we can get. They get seared up; they have to have that meaty chew or the sandwich doesn't make sense. And shrimp is very expensive right now, so as a businessman too I need to find a way to sell it to the guests where it makes sense. Due to a collapse in some of the Asian shrimp farming last year the local shrimp price has fluctuated wildly for about six months and now has settled to about a dollar-fifty, dollar-sixty—more than it was two, two and a half years ago, solid, from every purveyor.

There's more demand for the product, so we ask more from the guests for it, so it needs to be the biggest shrimp possible. We sear them in a cast-iron skillet, so we can't have smaller shrimp. They just disappear into nothing and then, you know, the guest is like, [*Grumbling*] "Where's the shrimp sandwich?" you know, and it's not good. It's much better when they're big, meatier shrimp that it takes more than one bite to eat one, you know. And that is probably what a lot of people, if they only come into town to eat one sandwich and eat that there, that's probably their idea of Killer Poboys. They've heard of a shrimp po-boy before. Most places in New Orleans, a shrimp po-boy is fried shrimp dressed [with] mayonnaise, lettuce, tomato, pickle—maybe just mayonnaise, lettuce, pickle—maybe just mayonnaise, cabbage, because there's still two or three places that still do that—maybe just this. So, "dressed" could mean all kind of stuff, but it usually exists within four to five ingredients. So then they get something that turns that on its head. It's got the Vietnamese flare to it. It's shrimp, but they're not fried; they're seared up, and it's got a lot of herbs and a lot of vegetables, so I think it makes a good impression.

[00:33:09]

SR: I'm guessing that at Killer Poboys the customer never gets the question: "Do you want that dressed?"

[00:33:15]

CB: No. I mean some people, maybe their mind's trained to say "dressed." In our meme age, a lot of people just don't want to read anything or make a choice. Maybe after two Bloody Marys, you're on vacation, you don't—you know. The questions we get asked: "What's the best? What should I order?" I'm like, "I don't know. What should you order?" [*Laughs*] There's only five things. But we don't usually get, you know, "Can I have that dressed?" because we say, well, dressed is as it comes, and it's displayed on the menu. With that sandwich per se, I don't

modify, you know, barely anything out of there. If you just want shrimp, bread, and sauce, you don't want Killer Poboys. I mean if you just want shrimp and bread, you don't really want Killer Poboys, and we try to dissuade people from modifying the food too much. We put a lot of thought and effort into it. It's not like we made some piece of art that we don't want you to tear up. We just want people to be happy, and sometimes it makes no sense to—. I'd rather lose a sale than have an unhappy guest. So, that's kind of how we do business. But now with the word-of-mouth and a lot more guests coming in, they're coming for the new-school po-boy experience anyway, so they don't ask to change it a lot, you know. Sometimes we have—like, most people say, "Can I not have sriracha in the sauce?" And, okay, that's an easy one. Or maybe they don't want—they ask to take out a—. So many people don't like cucumber. I had no friggin' clue. I love cucumbers. Well, the cucumber's already mixed with the vegetables, so they're like, "Okay, that's fine," you know. Or they don't want a component of the vegetable garnish. But two weeks ago we had people coming in asking for extra vegetables, so I'm like, "All right, thank you, you Californians. We love you. Please, come eat our vegetables." [*Laughs*]

[00:34:52]

SR: I'd like to hear about other sandwiches, but first I am really interested in what you have to say about dried shrimp.

[00:35:01]

CB: Okay. Well, as far as I know, and by no means am I a professional scholar of history or any kind of research fellow or anything, but one of the first Asian-American communities in South Louisiana was Filipinos brought here by the Spanish. And the Spanish, great colonial administrators, must better than the French when they ruled Louisiana: they rebuilt the French Quarter that you people walk down here and, "Oh, the French Quarter!" Well, it pretty much was

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built by Spaniards on the backs of people escaping the slave revolt in Haiti to do all the metal work and some of the carpentry and plastering. I think, at one point during Spanish dominion, not only did they stick the Isleños in St. Bernard Parish—people from the Canary Islands—but they also stuck some Filipinos down in Lafourche Parish and lower Jefferson Parish. Their communities no longer exist, they have been wiped out, but one of their legacies—and I'm pretty sure this correlates to them—is the industry of shrimp drying and Louisiana dried shrimp. I mean, it's the most natural product in the world. It's like shrimp jerky. They take shrimp, they throw some salt on them, they dry them in the sun, and that might not even be so close to how it's done now, but that's how they used to do it. I don't know what, where—if this stuff was being imported or if it was all from the local market, but I'm pretty sure that's how we got this dried shrimp product. I've never seen it anywhere else except for from the Gumbo Belt: from Biloxi to Houston, or Pensacola to Houston, basically. I don't know if I just coined that term, but I've used that a lot when trying to explain other complicated Southern cultural colloquialisms to people, especially pertaining to food. Yeah, we love the ingredient, man. I think it's great. Please, go grab some dried shrimp. If you buy a little packet down here in New Orleans, they might even have a recipe on the back for like white bean fricassee with dried shrimp or something like that. But, yeah, it's good stuff.

[00:37:02]

SR: Where do you get yours?

[00:37:05]

CB: I used to buy them in bulk from a seafood distributor, like a small guy. Now I just kind of pick them up at Rouses, which is a small chain of local grocery stores, and they're usually kind of hanging out by the register by the other spice blends, and a little bit goes a long

way. I mean I buy, you know—. We've been looking to see if we can network with somebody down there, an excuse to go drive down the bayou and buy a couple pounds of them at a time, because they don't go bad. They're dried shrimp, right? But, yeah, they're really easy to obtain. I have never seen a package of, like, some Cajun-sounding last names, like "Poche Dried Shrimp," then you look on the back and it says, "Product of China." I've never seen that. I've seen it on the crawfish before, co-branding, but I've never seen it on the dried shrimp. So, who knows?

[00:37:56]

SR: Thanks. It's sort of a side interest of mine, the dried shrimp. The first time I ever went into a grocery store outside of New Orleans it was in Morgan City, and there was like fifteen different brands of dried shrimp. It was staggering. Thanks for that.

[00:38:13]

CB: I'm sure that you could go to Morgan City and you could probably do an oral history about what's the best brand, what's the best recipe for each brand, why whose loyalties exist for whatever, and there you've just got yourself a whole other oral history project, right?

[00:38:31]

SR: Yeah, you have no idea how much I'd love to do that. Could you tell us about another sandwich or two?

[00:38:37]

CB: Oh, yeah, definitely. We could talk about the notorious Dark and Stormy Pork Belly po-boy—formerly Dark and Stormy Pork Belly. I don't want to get sued by Gosling. I don't know if they own that term, but supposedly they do. So the original idea, we started doing like kind of a braised pulled pork po-boy, and we're so small it was hard to keep up with doing pork shoulders. The flavor on them was inspired by the Dark and Stormy cocktail, which is dark rum

and ginger beer. That's it. So we played with some of those flavor elements, and eventually we started making a glaze with ginger, local rum—we use New Orleans Rum right now, and I'm looking into another local rum that just came out too, to use in that sauce—and literally a boatload of cane syrup. We use light rum and then the Steen's cane syrup, which is a great local Louisiana product. It's probably one of the last sugar mills in the country that make this cane syrup product, which is cousin to molasses. It's not as chalky; it's not that earthy tone of molasses. It's a little lighter, it's definitely sweeter, and it's sticky but not as sticky as molasses either. So the idea was, that dark rum flavor, we just took the sugar element where that comes from and put it back in with the cane syrup. And I was like, "Well, screw this pork shoulder." I was like, "Let's do this with pork belly." It makes perfect sense because it will be sweet in glaze. [00:40:14]

So we started doing it with pork belly. I sourced some great pork belly from Beeler's Farms in Iowa. It's like a four-generation family farm operation. Oh, and I digress: all of the meats we've always used have been all-natural to our standards, and our chef standards for all-natural is that the meat has had no growth hormones or antibiotics, and it's led a cruelty-free existence to the best of the ability of, you know, fooling with livestock, and that they have been fed a vegetarian diet. So that kind of limits some of what we can buy to do, but we found this great pork belly that comes from up there and it's beautifully rippled with fat. It's fifty to sixty percent fat and the rest is lean. We marinate the pork belly in the glaze for at least a day, and then we cook it in the glaze and then cool it down, cut it into slices. It's still very fatty, almost a David Chang pork belly bun, you know. I mean, that's the same kind of texture we're going for, a chew enough in the fat to where it's a mouthful. It's not completely yielding; we don't serve it with the crispy skin element. That's just not how it occurs. The sandwich is then—. The pork

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belly slices are then re-glazed and served, with the sticky glaze, with a very simple lime slaw, which is just cabbage, lime, lime zest, and salt and a hint of vinegar and our garlic mayonnaise—our homemade garlic aioli—which is made from scratch with good eggs, good oil, garlic, on the French bread. And that's it. And a spritz of lime.

[00:41:49]

So the idea was the Dark and Stormy cocktail, which is kind of rich and full, with that little bit of lime on the back end. Now it's just the rum-glazed pork belly. We got tired of people asking what the hell Dark and—. "What is this Dark and Stormy?" Some people were like—they get here to get drunk—"Let me get the Dark and Shitty," [*Laughs*] you know. It was just getting kind of crazy, so we revamped all our menu copy about a year ago to just cut down on wait time for the line and words that needed to be spoken between guest and cashier. But it's been probably our most controversial sandwich, because at this point, you know, we ask every guest—. We screen them a little bit, and some people kind of like this or some people get annoyed by it: "I know what pork belly is!" Well, some people have no clue that they're going to get a lot of fat, so we need to find out if you're all right with the pork fat, because if you're not all right with it, that's how it comes. No, we didn't do it wrong. I don't care where else you've eaten. There's no chef that takes the fat out of the pork. It makes no sense whatsoever to trim all the fat off of a pork belly. I mean, you might as well just take some twenty-dollar bills and throw them right on your grill or on your fryer or something like that. It just doesn't—you know. So we've heard all kinds of—. One out of every 500 guests has this problem, so now we kind of screen them, and some people—. A lot of the Asian-Americans, they almost want to be like racially profiled. It's like, "Come on, I'm Asian, dude!" I'm like, "Well, what does that mean to me?"

[00:43:18]

But we get a lot of—. You know, it's been notorious because it's inspired the most contempt and/or adoration. A lot of people, when they cut loose, their idea is that: "Oh, I'm going to eat this fatty thing. This is awesome. I'm going to sit here at this bar on a Friday. I'm done with work. I'm going to drink two beers, do a shot, and eat a pork belly sandwich." So, it's not an organ; it's a piece of meat. There's just a lot of pork fat in it, which has made it kind of notorious. But when the sandwich is put together, it's, you know, this yielding, unctuous, beautifully rich pork fat with striations of wonderful pork meat in a sweet and sticky glaze with the very sour slaw and the crunchy bread and the soft pillowing effect of the aioli, which helps protect some of the bread from the moisture. It really makes sense when you eat it, to me, if you don't have a big problem eating fat. So, I eat a steak; I eat the whole thing, the crispy fat. I'll even save it till later because I love that shit. But, yeah, that's probably been the most notorious thing we've done.

[00:44:23]

Then I'll also probably talk about a third sandwich, and this sandwich has changed form and shape a little bit, but we've always been committed to having a vegetarian—or vegan even—option. So we think vegetable-forward on that, and right now it's a sweet potato sandwich, which has been very popular. During the summer when some of the good local sweet potatoes are getting a little harder to find, or they might be a little tougher, they've been aged—I think the sweet potatoes are harvested one time a year, and they just sit in warehouses; they need to be aged anyway—sometimes they get a little fibrous, and we'll do like an eggplant. We'll change the prep. We've done eggplants a bunch of different ways. But the sweet potato po-boy is the killer. It's roasted sweet potato rubbed down with just a little bit of a complex spice that I make

that has like seven or eight spices. It's served with the black-eyed pea and pecan purée, which is hummus-y, and some greens—chard, collards, mustard greens, or kales. And we try to get all the vegetables local for that one, too, and a little bit of pickled onion, and that's the whole sandwich. So it's a lot of southern ingredients thrown together in a different context. The sweet potato is very meaty. I love sweet potatoes. They're sweet and they give it some heft, and the beans and greens are in there and they kind of make almost like a complete protein for a person that abstains from meat. And, you know, that's probably—. The idea that we're going to give a filling vegetable sandwich that's not an afterthought, too, I think has also resonated with a lot of guests, so even some non-vegetarian people come and get the sandwich. I've seen it happen before: the dude you expect to order the meatiest thing on the menu—like, it's Sunday, been in town for two days, dude needs vegetables: "Let me get the sweet potato sandwich." Totally happy and fine with it.

[00:46:07]

So, that's kind of been like the crux of the menu for almost our entirety of being whatever well known is in the food world—you know, being kind of locally known. Those three offerings probably speak our story the strongest.

[00:46:22]

SR: I really like that sweet potato sandwich.

[00:46:26]

CB: It's a good sandwich.

[00:46:27]

SR: It's a good sandwich, and it's—. You know, in a lot of ways—. In many ways your place makes me wonder if it could have thrived like it has pre-Katrina. And hearing a po-boy

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chef talk about how there was never any—. Like, in the one breath having the pork belly sandwich, and in another breath having to have a vegetarian option when there are only five sandwiches: that's definitely 2015 New Orleans. Was it because of demand that you didn't think twice about having a vegetarian option, or because that's how you were trained, or that's just your personal sensibility?

[00:47:12]

CB: I would think that it probably is a combination of all three, and if my wife was here she'd be: "Oh, no. We eat vegetables, so we're going to serve vegetables," and it's true. We try to eat a lot of vegetables. We're in sort of this industry where we have to go out and dine—*have* to. Oh, my God, what a burden. But, you know, I mean just professionally I dine more than I'd like to say here—I'm not going to show you my credit card statement—and drink a little bit more than I probably should, just out of a matter of networking in just our profession. So we always, when we cook, we don't eat a lot of meat at the house. And I think that it really just evolved from that personal sensibility. We knew the demand was there because, I mean, in the French Quarter—. And I'll back up and I'll totally go off-gear here, and I'll say the idea that you can come in and have a—modern, in a sense that post-foodie-ism, post-food TV, post-Emeril—that you can come down to the Quarter and eat something other than the classics, or finer dining, sit-down dining—. I think Sylvain really broke that, when people saw: "Oh, shit, look at his bistro." And you can't even get a table there every night of the week. Now I think that a lot of properties in the Quarter are going to start to turn over more chef-driven food and less a-big-company-distributed-by-Sysco made this gumbo for us—we didn't tell you that, but here it's—you know, whatever the case may be.

[00:48:47]

So, yes, I think maybe it has less to do with Katrina and more to do with just foodie-ism in America that we can thrive with what we do. But if you look at our menu, we try to have something on there for everyone. So if you eat meat—and most of the specials that I do when we do them are usually meat, a different lamb or beef, because I have a farm, Two Run Farm based out in Mississippi, that does beef and lamb. But most of the main menu, you know, we have two meat offerings, we have no poultry, and the rest, if you're like ovo-lacto-pesco, you've got the menu covered. Some people that are like, maybe they heard misinformation that we were mostly vegetarian: "Where's the rest of the vegetarian stuff?" And I'm like, "I got five things on there, man." By the numbers we beat everybody just because we only have five things on the menu, so if you don't eat shrimp but you eat vegetables and cheese, that's two of my menu items, so you're covered.

[00:49:49]

That just became fun, you know. I mean, I've never been into the old way of vegetarian cuisine per se—a lot of fake meat substitution kind of things—but I think that that's dead. I mean, there's so many restaurants around the country, and around the world even. There's French chefs that have dropped their Michelin star to open a bistro with vegetable tasting menus. I mean, Thomas Keller's been doing the vegetable tasting menu at French Laundry for, God, fifteen years now. And then you've got like Dirt Candy in New York really pushing the envelope. I think there's a lot of vegetarian cuisine that is even left to be developed that could become part of this American mainstay pastiche of quick-service food and/or finer dining. The vegetables are very much of-the-moment, especially when you're doing local. The most intense example of this would be Michel Bras's gargouillou, the big, crazy, of-the-moment vegetable salad that changes every day and half of it's foraged that morning. So I think that would be the

preeminent example of doing the very of-the-moment vegetable iteration. It doesn't have meat because it doesn't need it.

[00:51:11]

We do have some values, like we buy the all-natural meat. You know, I don't want to be serving big hunks of meat that half of it gets thrown away by the guest anyway. And we don't have any space—. The health department, you're supposed to keep chicken in its own shelf. I've never had that shelf so, you know, [*Laughs*] we're just like, "All right, we're not going to find anything to do with poultry yet at this space." So, sweet potatoes are great, man. I barely have any refrigeration. I buy a case of sweet potatoes; it doesn't need to be in a refrigerator till it's cooked anyway, and they kind of do better in like a dry area, a lightless environment, than sitting there having their cells change with all the moisture interchange from a cooler. So that's a great sandwich for us. Anything that doesn't need to go in a cooler is great for me, right? I do refrigerate my food, guys, and I follow the health code. It's not like that, but, you know.

[00:52:02]

SR: There are limitations.

[00:52:03]

CB: Yeah.

[00:52:04]

SR: I'm going to make you talk about one other sandwich. You don't have to go into deep detail, but I have to mention it, because the first time I ever ate at Killer Poboys I had a grilled cheese that was spritzed with Irish whiskey, if I remember correctly.

[00:52:17]

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CB: The drunken grilled cheese. So, yeah, I was going to delve into that. I didn't want to like go totally crazy with all our menu descriptions. So, the whiskey grilled cheese, and it is: it is a sandwich that is literally spritzed with Irish whiskey. It started off a much—. Everything has a story, so when—. You know, I don't think I've ever really considered a grilled cheese, its details. I like a grilled cheese, I order them sometimes. My wife loves a grilled cheese with just mustard, right? There's a lot of opinions. I think the grilled cheese lives for me in where burgers live. I've been involved in the burger business a little bit, and Americans, non-Americans—everybody has an opinion about a hamburger. They have strong opinions and they're passionate and you could be doing everything right as far as ingredients, service, cooking, yada, yada, yada; if it doesn't meet the expectation of the hamburger, the guest will think it's going to suck. Some people like a grilled hamburger; they will not have a griddled hamburger. Some people like a griddled—. Me, I'm like, "The more the merrier, man." I can eat any kind of hamburger. I can eat a shitty hamburger from Bud's, you know, to Company Burger, to the [Daniel] Boulud's short-rib burger and love them all for their own merit. I'm kind of an opportunistic eater anyway, so a lot of stuff exists like that for me.

[00:53:41]

I never really considered executing a vision of a grilled cheese until two things happened. One, when I worked at the Green Goddess we used to do a grilled cheese there. It was called Father Pat's Grilled Cheese, and it was Cahill's Irish Porter Cheddar, which is this weird-looking cheese. The curds are washed in dark beer and then pressed into a cheddar and then set up in wax. They have it at Rouses. It's kind of made on a semi-industrial scale in Ireland, but it is a true Irish product and it's got this variegated look to it, like stained glass almost. They made a cheese with whiskey as well. So, we sold this, and I was like, "Whoa." This restaurant, it's kind

of a hot restaurant. People are coming out here and they're ordering these grilled cheeses to split, to share, or to have it as a meal, as a complement, as part of a tasting. I'm like, "Wow, okay, so you can make money selling people grilled cheeses." No problem. It was better ingredients. It was thought—. There was details behind it. It had a story. The guy I used to work for, Chris DeBarr, his—. Father Pat, who the grilled cheese was named after, had been like, you know, strong counsel to his wife, and she was involved in a kind of civic protest against the closing of a church uptown called Our Lady of Good Counsel, and that's where the guy was and whatever. Yada, yada, yada. So, they immortalized this dude with a grilled cheese sandwich.

[00:55:09]

So, when we kind of set the menu up, I was like, "Well, shit, we got to have another sandwich. Some people just aren't going to eat po-boys." So I had seen a really cool artisanal Irish cheese where they wash it in whiskey and then it's set up on hay, and I'm like, "Okay, we cannot afford—." You know, twenty-dollar-a-pound cheese is not going to get melted into a grilled cheese for the guests in the back of the bar. "Here's your grilled cheese, Sir. It's twenty-seven dollars and ninety-five cents." Ain't gonna happen. So, I started looking around for what's the best possible cheddar we can get and how can we put whiskey in here, because we're in an Irish pub and that's the shot man, Irish whiskey, right: Tullamore, Jameson, Bushmills, Redbreast. I mean, I love Irish whiskey too, so I was like, "This makes sense." People could have a Guinness with the whiskey-grilled cheese, and that could be their Irish Car Bomb, or whatever.

[00:56:04]

So it was much more complicated when we started. I reduced whiskey and made a compound butter for the inside and spread it on the inside, and then eventually I was like, "Well, we need to simplify this." Now we just, you know, go to Sally Beauty Supply and buy an

aluminum spray bottle, and we just probably put about, you know, .25 to .4 of an ounce of whiskey in each sandwich. We spray it all over on the inside, on the cheese, and we baste it with the whiskey as it's cooking. It is the drunken grilled cheese, and if you never knew that the whiskey was in there, you probably would never be able to guess that, but there is some great—. The cheese we use is an aged Irish cheddar. Sometimes we buy Hooks from Wisconsin, sometimes we buy Irish or English cheddars, but they're usually from twelve to eighteen months so they kind of have the same structure. They've got a little, kind of almost developing that crystalline salt thing going on that nice aged cheddars and some other Goudas and stuff like that will get. It just made sense because the Irish cheddar itself shares a lot of aroma profiles with the whiskey, but they deviate in some strong parts, the strongest being that the whiskey has no salt or fat element to it, but it has this inherent bitterness. They do share the caramel, the vanilla sometimes, tones that—it just made perfect sense to me. And plus, once again, we're in an Irish pub and we got to have something with whiskey on it, right?

[00:57:40]

The original menu had the Guinness beef, which I don't do that much anymore. I'm actually doing a Bayou Teche Bière Noire beef instead of the Guinness, so we're bringing it back a little bit. I've got some cooking; it will be a special this weekend. It's like a beef debris with shallots and kale in a horseradish sauce, a drippy beef sandwich. That was like the first thing that ever went on our menu. It's a great sandwich. I love it. We just ran out of space to cook big, forty-, fifty-pound pieces of beef, [Laughs] and still do everything else that we were doing. Shrimp won over everything. Shrimp kicked everybody—. Shrimp was like, "Fuck y'all. Get out of here," you know. We need more space to peel shrimp at.

[00:58:20]

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SR: That's a common theme in the po-boy oral histories so far, is shrimp being the favorite.

[00:58:30]

CB: Yeah. I have a friend that lives in Oakland that's from New Orleans originally, but he's been in Oakland for a very long time. He identifies as New Orleans-born, Oakland-raised, -bred, whatever. And he recently got into the po-boy business out there, and he's got a food truck called Pelican Poor Boys—he spells it "poor boys." So we're both in the same world per se, and he's just getting started, and the three phone calls I've had have been like, "Man, that fucking shrimp po-boy. I don't know. Are we just going to sell shrimp?" I'm like, "Yep. You're just going to sell it all day. Just love it, learn to love it, find the best way to do it possible." There is something about the sound of that phrase. There's just something about that terminology. People, they want a shrimp po-boy, even if they have no clue what a shrimp po-boy is, you know. It could be like shrimp paste smeared on bread that you probably fermented—you know, the Indonesian or Filipino shrimp paste that smells awful. Just, "Oh, shrimp po-boy: here you go." They might not come back for it, but they'd still order it. They'd still consider it, which I think is a testament to our great Gulf seafood, which once again is, you know, shame on you if you're not buying Gulf seafood. Unnamed—I do go to the restaurant wholesale [store] a lot, and I do see supposed institutions of our dining buying cases and cases of basa fish, which they sell as catfish, and Asian farmed shrimp, so I think it's sad that that occurs. I mean, I understand, you got to make—. You know, people got to eat, and you got to make money. I don't think that's the best way to make money. I think that we can all just charge a little bit more for the superior Louisiana product, and shame on me if it's the one time they can't get—and I just see them and

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this is the one replacement, you know. But I don't think that's true because I've seen how much of the stuff flies out of there.

[01:00:17]

SR: One thing I want to make sure to get to, that I kind of skipped over earlier, is you talked a bit about where your wife worked and her career trajectory. Can you tell us about your career trajectory?

[01:00:33]

CB: Sure. I'll go over both of them. So, I started working with food when I was a teenager. I started working at a little mom-and-pop all-natural food store called Eve's Market uptown in the university area, and I worked in the deli, I worked in produce, I checked people out at the register, and that was the first time that I actually touched food and made money doing it. I culled the produce. It was great. I learned a lot about produce and what grew locally, you know. My mother cooks, and [she] taught herself how to cook from Julia Child and Franey, the 60-Minute Gourmet and stuff—Pierre Franey, right, that used to write for *The New York Times*. So she very much had—. She had like a couple dishes she had learned from her maw-maw, because *my* maw-maw—her mother—didn't cook. So the jambalaya and the gumbo and the recipes that I still use, the techniques and the ideas behind them, that comes from my mom's side of the family. Her grandmother was a Gautreau from Gonzales, which is the undisputed jambalaya capital of the world. They have a jambalaya competition there. It is not about iterations, tropes, fusions, ideas. You are literally given six ingredients and everybody cooks from the same six ingredients, so there is an ideology and conservative element about what constitutes jambalaya in that particular place and time.

[01:02:01]

So my experience with food as a young man was my mother would cook from scratch, mostly in the French style—not that she had grown up doing that, but that was something that she developed a passion for because she had to teach herself how to cook. So, we ate a lot of salads; she would make some more complicated dishes when I was younger, and then she kind of developed her own kind of canon of dishes. You know, it was all very simple food but with good ingredients.

[01:02:32]

So when I was in high school—and I was not a good student, I was not disciplined, I wasn't into sports or anything like that—I was into having a good time, partying, and I needed to support that, so I got a job. So I'm working at this deli, and I did that for about two years, and then I left high school and I was like, "Okay, I'm going to go to college a year early." It never happened; whatever. So, I needed a job. I was like, "All right, well, I partied this last summer," and I don't know if I got fired or whatever happened, and I was like, "I'm not working at the little deli uptown anymore. I'm going to go to the French Quarter and get a job at a restaurant." I went and applied at Arnaud's, and they told me, they said, "Hey, we have a job on our Bourbon Street property called Arnaud's Remoulade. You could be a food runner." I was like, "What's that?" [They said,] "You run the food out to the guests." I'm like, "Okay, I'm sure I can do that." And after a couple weeks of doing that—and the cool thing about being a food runner there, it's a separate kitchen for the more casual concept that Arnaud's has, and it's these magical moments when you see the behind the scenes at a restaurant and it's such a violent, loud, clangy enterprise with—you know, not this day and age, but—a chef standing in the back, smoking a cigarette, somebody bleeding, a dude with a scar, a burn mark all over his arm, and waiters in their penguin suits fluttering around. It seemed like such a fun place to be, and I told the chef, Chef

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Tommy—who's still there, Tommy Giovanni. He's been there forever. I told the chef, I said, "Look, I want to be in the kitchen. I don't want to do this. I want to be in the kitchen, so what do I have to do?"

[01:04:07]

So he let me work in the kitchen at Arnaud's Remoulade, and we did like po-boys, the more traditional ones, and muffulettas, and this, that, and the other. And then I'd do some shifts at Arnaud's, too, and that's what started it all off, which is where I met my lovely wife, who's not here, and she was having the same experience. She was fast tracking to go to Johnson and Wales and in high school still. She wanted to work in the culinary arts, so she would work nights and weekends at Arnaud's and hang out with all the—. You know, if the family knew the kind of people we were all hanging out with—. And that was our first introduction to the Erin Rose because that's where we used to all drink after work, amongst other places.

[01:04:51]

SR: When you were how old?

[01:04:53]

CB: Well, we were eighteen, the caveat being this is like I think about two or three years after the drinking age here had been changed, so it was still very much loose down here in a lot of these bars. Obviously, any bar downtown, you don't go into the place that our business is at unless you're twenty-one. You can't get in; you will get carded. But it was a little different era back then, and my wonderful, awesome landlords did not own the business back then. We were young, but I think that was pretty much everywhere. I think if you looked like you belonged nobody was bothering you, you know. And they didn't have the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms spending our awesome tax dollars coming here running sting operations on small business

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owners, which they do, just for another source of revenue for the government. So you can still get a drink young as hell in New Orleans; you just get somebody to buy it off the street on Bourbon Street, and then you're walking down—you know, it's kind of ridiculous.

[01:05:53]

But, yes, we were young. I did that for a little while, and I then kind of left. I had another, you know, "I'm going to take a couple weeks off to party." So I partied for a couple weeks and I was like, "Shit, I need a job." This happened a couple times [*Laughs*] in my late teens, early twenties. So I ended up at Lucky Cheng's Restaurant, way back in the day. I don't know how long you've been in town. Are you familiar—?

[01:06:20]

SR: It was still open when I moved here.

[01:06:21]

CB: It was a small chain of drag cabaret mixed with fine dining restaurants. The owners I worked for had actually bought and were in dispute for the small chain. There was a location in the East Village, there was Miami Beach, and there was New Orleans, and they changed a vowel in the name and they ran it as such. Yeah. I went there and it was really awesome. A lot of people had flowed in and out of there. I think Adolfo Garcia was a chef there for a couple years. I actually found a stack of menus one day that had all the menus for all the iterations of Lucky Cheng's, and I remember seeing those menus and I was like, "Man, this shit's cool."

[01:07:02]

So we would—. It was the first time it was like, you know, part of business to go to the Asian market and source these kind of cool ingredients that were so very foreign but you could take them and, regardless if you couldn't read the label, you could still crack it open and try a

little bit, eat it, and see how you were going to put it into a special. And some of it went on the actual menu itself. They billed themselves as Asian Creole fusion. This was back when people were doing a lot of fusion, and in retrospect we had some real stinkers in the fusion genre on the [menu]. We had, like, a jambalaya lo mein. The sauce was good, it was good, but it was, you know, probably better left to never be served to anybody. In its execution somehow—.

[01:07:47]

Then I left there. I was working for this Dutch chef there and, it was funny. He'd just moved to the city and he was like, "New Orleans!" He was so romantic, like, "Oh, this place!" He had gotten out of a long relationship with a wife and a corporate job, a chef corporate job that he left behind in the Bay Area, and moved his younger girlfriend out here, and right after she moved here she got pregnant and they moved back to the Bay Area. Yeah. But I remember we lived together in a house next to the mule barn on Rampart [Street] right there in the Marigny, which was a cheap-ass apartment then. God knows how much they charge. I've actually been in the house—a friend lived there for a while. They don't charge that much for it, but I think we had, you know, a thousand square feet, and he was maintaining it and I was—. He needed—so I was just a couple hundred dollars a month or whatever living with him, because I was the main cook, so if he could put me somewhere to stay—right?—he'd know where I'm going to be going in the busy weekend. Yeah, I remember that was a good time, and I can remember the mules like all night: [*Mule noises*] Mules just make so much noise at night.

[01:08:54]

So after that I went and worked with Scott at Stella, and that was a couple months. I mean that was before—you know, way before he got a lot of the acclaim, per se. I don't really know how Chef Scott Boswell, of a closed restaurant now—and we won't even get into stories about

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that. But that was another cool place, where it was like awesome, you know, world-of-pantry-ingredients kind of thing. I mean, he and his plating never left the '90s so, whatever. His prices definitely did, and it's not there anymore to tell its own story. That was a short tenure there. I will say that out of the whole crew that I worked with—there was like four dudes—we all are in touch now, so it was kind of a special kitchen crew, and that doesn't happen often—you know, you keep track of people. One of the guys has been nominated for two James Beard awards, Justin Girouard. He's got a restaurant in Lafayette called French Press. Another one of the guys owns a restaurant in North Carolina, and a third guy is here and there doing that, so we all kind of keep in touch now.

[01:10:00]

After that I started working at GW Fins, and I was in and out of there two or three times over about five years. I left to be a college student, and that didn't work out, and I got sucked back into cooking. Then had a stick up my ass to get a credential, so I borrowed a shit-ton of money and went to a Yankee culinary school, the New England Culinary Institute, which I think is like in financial arrears and about to close now. I still owe the private loan company money for it. It would suck if I just—. I mean, it would be awesome if I owed the school, right? "Oh, you guys can't pay your debts? Well, neither can I. See you later. Bye!" So I left culinary school; came back here because Katrina happened when I was up there.

[01:10:37]

SR: How long were you in culinary school?

[01:10:38]

CB: I was just there for a year. I did an advanced—. I have an associate's degree with them and did like an advanced—. I literally felt—. It was in my mid-twenties and I felt that I

needed some credential in life. I'd tried college; you know, I'd tried stuff, and it was a good experience. It just was very expensive. Young cooks come to me and I recommend all kinds of different things before they're willing to take, you know, a very big loan for their future, especially if you just want to stay at the employee level. You'll be at twelve dollars an hour twelve years down the line, still paying your student loan.

[01:11:14]

So I was at GW Fins, and Chef Tenney [Flynn] is awesome, and he was the chef—one of the chef partners there. I learned a lot of kitchen discipline there because he runs a very tight ship, and I think, you know, really working with the products there, it was amazing. A fish that twenty other chefs in New Orleans would be happy to receive Chef Tenney will send back because he doesn't like the way that one inch of the gill looks, and they will send him back a fresher fish. They will find one or they'll take it off the menu. So he's got a fanatical dedication to having the freshest seafood still ten—God, fifteen years that they've been open. Fourteen, thirteen years later, they still probably have the best fish in the city as far as variety and sourcing, and, you know, they don't let you touch the whole fish; you got to have some kind of trust. You're not just some new jack, walk in off the street, and you're like, "Okay, I'm a fish butcher," [and they're like,] "Okay, here you go." No, absolutely not. Every single big fish or small fish gets prodded and caressed, fondled, looked at, sniffed, smelled, sniffed in two different places. He's got all kinds of philosophy about sniffing the fish. It's not as easy as just smelling it; he wants you to like collect the slime and hold the slime to the light and stretch it out a little bit—and now I'm embellishing the story, but it's that fanatical devotion that has given him his acclaim he's had, so it makes sense.

[01:12:48]

So that was a great kitchen to work at, and I worked with the partners there. They did a southern pit barbecue place called Zydeque, and I worked with them there as an employee. For a while I was doing both. I smelled like fish in the morning and barbecue at night. I had the dogs and the cats in the neighborhood loving me.

[01:13:09]

So anyway, I went to culinary school at the New England Culinary Institute. I was up there for about seven or eight months solid, and when Katrina happened part of my family did not evacuate—. Nobody evacuated. My mom's side, they were all stuck and they had just closed on a house in Old Arabi in St. Bernard Parish, so they were flooded out. It was kind of a traumatic time. So after school, when I should have been going somewhere else to do an externship, I came down here to scrape shit off the hardwood floor, start sanding the walls, do whatever we could to get the house back in order so they could start to, you know, redo their house. Then I just did the rest of my school-required externship at GW Fins because they needed employees, I needed a job, I needed to fulfill shit for school, but I couldn't really be anywhere else but down here because of family issues. It just felt that I needed to go home and see what was going on. Then after that there was no jobs for me left in New Orleans. In 2006 everybody had twenty sous-chefs and twenty lead, reliable, dependable people, and they didn't have entry-level people. They didn't have dishwashers, and that's where all the jobs were, for that very small, brief moment in time. The entrepreneurship level really rose after I left. I moved to New York City and did what I did up there.

[01:14:32]

April: similar story. She attended Johnson and Wales for four years while coming home and working at Arnaud's, and she's worked in old Creole stuff like that in New Orleans, but also

she worked some really cool jobs for this consultant up in Rhode Island. They would do all kinds of different projects, from menu revamps for new brands, to working with established brands that were in quick service or fine dining, to working with like a food manufacturer. So she's had a lot of experience dealing in different aspects of the business. She moved back from up north in like 2008 or '09, and I moved back here in 2010. She had dropped doing, like, putting on the chef coat and looking for chef jobs. She just kind of grew out of wanting to do that but still wanted to work with food and hospitality, so she actually was running this like kind of guerilla dinner. She had talked to all the bartenders in the Quarter and was like, "Look, I'm going to start cooking food and delivering." Because she was having all these dinner parties and she was like, "Oh, everybody likes to eat this food. Well, fuck it. I'll just cook here at the house and, you know, twenty of y'all will buy from me a week to cover my ingredients, put some money in to pay the rent, and we're good."

[01:15:52]

So she started this little catering operation, and then together, when we started dating, we did a couple jobs that had nothing to do with Killer Poboys, what we were doing at the time—cocktail parties, dinner parties—and we were like, "All right, let's work together." That's the biggest—. Any problem in our relationship has usually been work-related. It's been great, right? [*Laughs*] So all the people out there reading or listening who work with their spouse can understand the joy and like having to learn how to communicate better, because sometimes work things need to be solved and they can't just be put to the side. So we've been extremely lucky to have the business and amount of press and acclaim, or whatever we get, but it all comes back to the fact that we just started just to make great sandwiches in the back of a bar and make a living doing it. Which we've achieved at this point, so, you know, problem solved.

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[01:16:50]

SR: That's really cool, that you figured out how to do that and that you're positive about working together, because I think a lot of spouses can't be positive about that. Do either of you actively miss working in fine dining?

[01:17:07]

CB: I mean, she doesn't, and she kind of like put the—. When you say, "fine dining," I mean food on plates is really the difference that we're kind of working with here. But sure, I do, but there's opportunities where—. I mean, I'm working with another chef; we're going to do like a vegetable menu, a summer vegetable series at Pearl Wine Bar coming up in the summer. We're going to do an eggplant dinner, an okra or a cucumber dinner, maybe a tomato or a pepper dinner, so we can do like nerdy stuff like that. I don't really miss some aspects of full-service restaurants. Some of it I do, per se, but right now we're trying to think about how we can expand what we do and still keep the excitement of—. What I miss is the dynamic, changing menus of plates. You know, selling people food on plates. And now is one of the best times ever, I think, to be like a modern American chef in America, if you're in the small markets or the big ones, because you have guests who have turned their back on wanting to spend any money with crap fast food and they're going to spend money with you, whether you do: quick service casual or more accessible full service that's less expensive. I've never really—. [*Pause; noisy vehicle passing*]

[01:18:54]

I don't think either of us has ever had—even when she still wanted to be a chef. You know, when I say this, April will always be a chef because that's who she is, but a chef that puts on checks and puts on a jacket. She wears a dress to work now and she loves that. But for me

personally, I've never aspired to be in the highest echelon of dining anyway. A bistro or a little bit more casual is kind of more my cup of tea. When I say, "fine dining," I mean like a Michelin experience or an ultra-high-end, detail-oriented tasting menu experience that occurs—say, Thomas Keller again, a Per Se, or something like that. A lot of people that are in my field, that's it; you've made it. I've always kind of more identified with—. There's a French chef that dropped all of his fancy crap, who's in Normandy—I totally forgot his name—and he just opened up like the equivalent of like Deanie's Seafood. He was like, [*In French accent*] "All right, fuck this. I'm going to do this." And I think that there is like the—because I've been—you know, there's a lot of chefs in France, like and Pascal Barbot, that I know have like gone into Paris and said, "Look, we're not going to get dinner service from Michelin. We don't give a fuck. Fuck Michelin. We don't care if they come here." And they're like the most acclaimed dudes working in the country now. But they're a little bit more like bistro-oriented, kind of fast service—plates that could be shared, or maybe not, but enough to mix and match. And a little less complicated manner of service, like, I don't know what side the salad fork's supposed to go on, and I never will, but that's fine.

[01:20:58]

So, you know, I miss putting food on a plate rather than a—. Sometimes plating on a po-boy, I mean, everything gets smooshed in-between the bread so at a certain point it's hard to take some kind of artistic vision and put it into effect on a plate, because it's a po-boy and it comes in a basket. But I'm super happy to be doing what I'm doing. I wouldn't be doing anything else, and we're lucky to be able to support our four full-time employees and a couple of our part-timers. Her paw-paw works for the business, my mom works for the business, we're looking at

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taking on a partner and his mom's going to work for the business. I mean, we're family-oriented, but fun values, not family values. I'm not that dude.

[01:21:46]

SR: Well, we're up against the clock.

[01:21:50]

CB: Mm hmm.

[01:21:51]

SR: You need to do dinner service. I have a final couple questions.

[01:21:55]

CB: Okay.

[01:21:56]

SR: I'd love to know if you know what your first po-boy was, or if you have an early po-boy memory you'd like to share. And also, what kind of po-boy you prefer now if you go out for a traditional—you know, not to Killer Poboys, but a New Orleans po-boy shop.

[01:22:15]

CB: Well, my first po-boy was probably a roast beef po-boy. Historically I'm a sucker for a good fried shrimp po-boy. I like roast beef, it's cool; I go get one like once a year at Parkway or something like that. But I'll go to the corner store right here and get a shrimp po-boy if I'm feeing a hankering, you know. There's something just quintessential to my food experience in New Orleans of the fried shrimp po-boy done exceptionally well. Who has interesting sandwiches right now? Mopho has some pretty cool, interesting sandwiches—once again, Asian-inspired. Lucky Rooster, Chef Neal [Swidler], had some cool bánh mì on that menu too that I thought was very interesting. They're no longer there, and—. Man. I mean, most

people that have done kind of what we've done have usually done it in a restaurant context. It's lunch at your restaurant and it's a sandwich offering, but it's like kind of a different po-boy, or the elements of it are more considered, you know, and then it gets pulled out for festivals and stuff like that. So, I can't really think of anything off the top of my head that is screaming out at me, you know, in that regard.

[01:23:33]

SR: That's okay. Do you know the name of the corner store that you just referred to?

[01:23:38]

CB: I'm not going to go down—. They don't use good bread there, so we're not going to do that. Yeah, don't—.

[01:23:43]

SR: [*Laughs*] Okay. That's fine.

[01:23:45]

CB: Yeah, don't worry about it.

[01:23:46]

SR: It's a corner store shrimp po-boy. Why do you think that roast beef was probably your first po-boy?

[01:23:51]

CB: I'm just imagining like—. I think an early memory is eating the roast beef. I don't know which one came first. I think the earliest memory of po-boy eating is a roast beef, but I think the most constant po-boy experiences have been fried shrimp, definitely.

[01:24:14]

SR: Did your family have a favorite po-boy shop?

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[01:24:17]

CB: You know, I wouldn't say we had a favorite po-boy shop. Whenever my mom talks about po-boys back in the day, she mentions a place called Acy's Pool Hall, which is where the Half Moon Bar used to be, down there on St. Mary [Street] at the Camp and Magazine [streets] split. She's like, "Oh, the roast beef there was amazing!" She's not a big sandwich eater so, you know, kind of like I said, I'm an opportunistic—. I kind of know where good po-boys are in a lot of the four corners of the greater New Orleans area. So I wouldn't say that I'd travel too far to have the quintessential version of one unless I've got to prove a point to a visitor or something like that, or instruct them. You know, initiate the non-initiated into the messy, wonderfully confusing, understanding of New Orleans food cuisine, what it means to different people of different ages, stripes, and colors, you know. So, yes; it's complicated.

[01:25:17]

SR: This is an anticlimactic question, but it might be my last one, and that is, I didn't—. If you have a sign on Conti Street, I didn't see it. Is that a philosophy or is that an ordinance?

[01:25:30]

CB: Well, we have no sign. It's kind of just grown into something that we have because, you know, we're hidden and we're secret and to the uninitiated you've found something: "Oh, my God!" But quite frankly, even though Bourbon Street has variances for all their signage, I'm pretty sure my landlord has as much signage as he's allowed to have ever, and we're in their bar, so we've never really made steps for any other signage. We haven't really needed to have a sign, and this is a testament to people wanting to find authentic experiences somewhere. Well, you literally have to find us. And some people say, "Oh! We didn't see the sign." I say, "Well, now you know where we're at and you'll never forget, will you?" So, better or worse, you won't

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forget where Killer Poboys is, especially if you're annoyed. Some people get annoyed because—whatever. I don't know. Some people just need to know everything before—. I don't know why it's annoying to them, but in the end I'm like, "Yeah, you found us now." And then I tell them, you know, "Let's keep the riff-raff out," or whatever, so then they feel like they're in an exclusive club of non-riff-raff. There's a lot of riff-raff floating around down here, y'all.

[01:26:39]

SR: It's true. All right, well, we'll wrap this up. Thank you so much for your time, Cam. It was really, really fun talking to you.

[01:26:48]

CB: All right. Great. Cool.

[01:26:52]

[*Transcript suspended*]

[01:28:58]

SR: We had one last question for Cam Boudreaux, which is: How do you think your previous experiences in restaurants and cooking culminated in your opening Killer Poboys?

[01:29:12]

CB: Well, I think that everything that came before for me professionally was setting us up to be a detail-oriented chef making po-boys and the sandwich. And some of the most successful po-boy operations in New Orleans, I would venture to say, have not been started by a chef or done with a chef's intent. I don't think that there was any moment where any of this clicked, that we had this preordained vision that we're going to stop everything and then we're going to make chef-y sandwiches with cool ingredients, some modern techniques, some local, you know, en vogue products. It was more just born out of pure necessity to 1) be an

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entrepreneur, and what product are we going to sell? And, 2) I think that a lot of the ideas we've had about dishes, plates, cuisine, world cuisines—we found like a point to filter them into a single bite. And I think that's probably what—. The balance of the bite, which is a chef's virtue, is being able to balance that single bite, or that single plate, or that one course in the nine courses or whatever it is—that wine with that food—that makes the best cuisine stand out. That would be all of the small little details, and I think most chefs will tell you that it all comes down to the details: how can you make a living at it, how can you be happy doing it, and how can you give the guest the best experience possible? That's my answer.

[01:31:00]

SR: Thank you. Awesome.

[01:31:01]

CB: Cool.

[01:31:04]

END OF INTERVIEW

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