

**LEAH CHASE**  
**Dooky Chase Restaurant**  
**New Orleans, LA**  
\* \* \*

Date: June 6, 2014

Location: Dooky Chase Restaurant—New Orleans, LA

Interviewers: Sara Roahen and John Pope

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: two hours, twenty-four minutes

Project: SFA Founders

**00:00:01**

**Sara Roahen:** This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Friday, June 6, 2014. I'm at Dooky Chase's Restaurant with Miss Leah Chase and Mr. John Pope, who is a reporter for [www.nola.com](http://www.nola.com) and *The Times-Picayune* in New Orleans, and also a huge fan of Miss Leah's butter beans and shrimp and her gumbo z'herbes. Miss Leah, could I ask you please to tell us your full name and what you do for a living?

**00:00:28**

**Leah Chase:** Well, my name is Leah Chase. And I'm here—I guess you'd say a chef, but I'm a cook. That's what I am, and I run this kitchen at Dooky Chase's Restaurant. Been here for what? Sixty-eight years.

**00:00:44**

**Sara Roahen:** Could you tell me for the record your birth date please?

**00:00:47**

**Leah Chase:** January 6, 1923.

**00:00:51**

**Sara Roahen:** Thank you. You know, this was a question that we were going to ask later on but since you mentioned it: What—to you, what is the difference between a cook and a chef?

**00:01:00**

**Leah Chase:** You know, a chef for one thing has that nice little certificate. He has earned; he has earned it. He deserves it; he earned it. He studied formally. He had formal training. A cook is somebody that just came up cooking. You know, had no formal training but they can cook. And they can work and put things together. And well, in my case I learned from those who have the certificates. **[Laughs]** I learned a lot from them, you know. You learn how to balance things out. You learn how to make ends meet in the kitchen and do whatever you have to do when you're a trained chef. And I like to give those trained chefs their credit, Sara, and that's why I say I'm a cook, really. But I run the kitchen. I do the buying. I do the menu and all of that. The same work that a chef does but he has a little bit more knowledge than me and I give him credit for that. I like to give him credit for that because he earned it and he worked hard to get it. So I guess that's the difference between a cook and a chef—not very much. **[Laughs]**

00:02:18

**Sara Roahen:** Does it bother you when people call you a chef?

00:02:20

**Leah Chase:** No, it doesn't bother me. It doesn't bother me at all as long as they realize that in their terms a "chef" means I'm a cook in the kitchen. You know, and then still [in] some cases this may work, Sara, with women particularly. I've had people say, "Well, what is a chef? Nothing." What do you mean, 'nothing?' What do you mean, 'nothing?' But in their eyes, a chef is just somebody who cooks, so they don't look at that sometimes as a respected form of art or respected degree. But it is. But some people look down on that. In my case, I had a lot of people that didn't give me any credit for anything. I was just a cook.

00:03:13

**John Pope:** Why?

00:03:15

**Leah Chase:** I don't—because we did it in our kitchens every day. Every black woman coming along cooked in the kitchen, and they just didn't understand what the professional cook would do. And if you're cooking in the restaurant, what difference that makes. They just—it's nothing to them. It's nothing. And I guess there's still some cases [in which] they feel that way. "What is a chef? Nothing." But it is *important*. It is as important as a doctor. It is as important as a lawyer.

00:03:50

**John Pope:** It's like an orchestra conductor.

00:03:52

**Leah Chase:** Uh-huh.

00:03:53

**John Pope:** I've always thought it was magic that food—the same courses could come out at the same time. No one can explain it to me, but it just—it's magic.

00:04:02

**Leah Chase:** It's magic in a way. It's magic how your mind works on food. If you work like I work my kitchen here—and it's hard for me to understand how people, they say they can like food and they can do with food but how they don't—in their mind they can't put it on a plate properly. In their mind, they don't know what goes together or how you can make that plate look great. They just—you just got to have that in your mind. And it doesn't have to have a degree. A degree would help you maybe because they have taught you how to do that, but you can do that just in your mind—just knowing food and loving food—be able to put it on the plate properly.

**00:04:48**

**John Pope:** But you've been cooking longer than a lot of chefs have been alive. [*Laughs*] So I mean I just—who were your role models when you were coming up?

**00:05:00**

**Leah Chase:** You know, in the restaurant business I had none because, well, black people didn't—they had little shops like my mother-in-law opened here. And she had—she cooked in the kitchen and she was a good cook, too, and she cooked and she—. What amazed me about people like my mother-in-law is they knew how to balance out things with no training at all. Just the natural ability to know how to make a profit off of something, you know, and do whatever you did.

**00:05:37**

So when I came in here I had to upgrade it to what I learned in the French Quarters, you know. I learned different things, different ways of preparing food, different kinds of food, and that's good.

**00:05:53**

**Sara Roahen:** Can we—I just want to back up a little bit so that—because we really—I really do want to hear about how you came to Dooky Chase’s Restaurant. But could you just back up and tell us maybe where you grew up and how you came to New Orleans?

**00:06:07**

**Leah Chase:** Well I grew up in a small town. I grew up in Madisonville. And the older I get the more appreciative I am of growing up in a small town, in what you call a “country town.” You learn so much. You can go through the woods. You learn what tree you can touch; what tree you can't touch. You can learn what wild foods you can eat; which ones you can't eat. You know all about the animals and their lives—which ones you can eat; which ones you can't eat. You learn so much and I’m so proud that my grandchildren came up liking the same things. Because I came up from this small town, they were able to go back. They love to hunt. They love to fish. They know all about wildlife. They know all of that. And that is so important.

**00:07:08**

People who grew up in urban towns and big cities don’t understand. They don’t know that. They don’t know food for one thing. They don’t know how it grows. They don’t know what it takes to bring it to the table. And in the country you learn all of that.

**00:07:26**

Then when you get to the city and you say, “Oh, I can take these same greens I have and I can do this with it. I can stuff this chicken with it that I didn’t know I could do that with it coming up in the country. I thought I could just eat greens and greens, or greens and rice, or

whatever. Now I know you can put it under different things and make it a beautiful dish.” So you learn and you build on what you learn. But coming up in the country you learn the basics. You learn what it takes to grow a hog. You know what it takes to do everything. I think that was an advantage for me.

**00:08:07**

**Sara Roahen:** Did you cook at home?

**00:08:08**

**Leah Chase:** Yes. You know my mother wasn't a great cook, poor darling. [*Laughs*] Well, who wants to cook for the Army every day? She had eleven of us that she raised, and my daddy who loved to eat and who ate, so she wasn't a great cook. She'd rather sew. She liked to sew. And you know what? Strangely enough when I came up, that was me. I'd rather sew. I like to sew. I would—I would like to do the housework. Like I would clean. The housework meant you mopped, you made the bed, you ironed. You did that. Well my sisters loved the kitchen and they were in the kitchen. And that astonished a lot of people because I never liked the kitchen. But you can grow to like something when you learn about it.

**00:09:00**

**Sara Roahen:** Well, how did that happen then? So I know you left the—you left Madisonville and came to New Orleans at what point? Can you tell us about that?

**00:09:09**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm. I came—see, there was no high schools. My daddy was so Catholic. My daddy was more Catholic than the Pope. We had to go—we could not go to public schools. Oh, he wouldn't—that would be unheard of that you would go anywhere that they didn't have religion taught, for one thing. He liked you to learn about God. He liked religion. So in the Catholic schools we got all of that.

**00:09:38**

So now there were no Catholic schools for blacks at all in Madisonville. So I had to come here. And I was taught by the Holy Family of nuns in Madisonville, and they had St. Mary's Academy here. So I came here to go to school here. And where was St. Mary's Academy when I came? On Orleans and Royal, of all the spaces. So where you come in through the French Quarter—the French Quarter. But you know people my age were not curious. You couldn't—I don't think you could run a good school in the French Quarter today. Kids are too curious.

**[Laughs]** You know, we would go up and down the streets and we would—. For instance, I would be coming down Orleans Avenue, coming from school, as quick as I walked. I lived on Allen and Galveston, the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward. That's a hike, and I walked to and from school every day on Orleans.

**00:10:34**

So on Orleans Street in the French Quarters I would always see these ladies sitting down in the most beautiful negligees I ever saw—pink ones, you know—and it didn't—. I don't know what you're doing in that; maybe that's what you wear. You know, it didn't cross my mind that these were ladies of the evening. I didn't even think about that. I would just see these ladies and you—. They had a big hallway in this house—I forget where it was—and you would see the

ladies sitting around in the hall in these negligees, but I didn't even question that. Today they'd say, "What are you doing in that? Well, wait a minute..." But in my day they didn't.

**00:11:21**

So I came through that era and went to school there. And then when I came out of school I went back home. There was no work [at] home but housework, so we did that. I worked for a lady who had a boarding house, Koep's Boarding House. I cleaned, washed some clothes, maybe cooked some food.

**00:11:41**

**Sara Roahen:** In Madisonville?

**00:11:43**

**Leah Chase:** In Madisonville, uh-hm. In Madisonville. Then I knew I didn't want to do that. So I asked my mother could I—?

**00:11:51**

**Sara Roahen:** Why not?

**00:11:53**

**Leah Chase:** Well because, I don't know how I was coming up, Sara. I was so different than all of my sisters. I always looked for bigger things and my mother used to always fuss at me. She said, "Your high mind is going to get you in trouble someday." So my thinking was what they called a "high mind" at that time. But I always thought about bigger things—big things. Like as a

little girl, you know in the country, you stand in the yard and you can see for miles. There's nothing high, nothing—you could just see for miles.

**00:12:30**

And when they have a rainbow, when there's a rainbow in the country, it looks huge because you could see everything. There are no buildings; just the beautiful rainbow. I remember standing in the yard and saying, "I *know*." You know, if you look at a rainbow you think you can walk to the end of it. I said, "I *know* I could walk to the end of that rainbow. And I know there's a pot of gold there. And I know—" That was a stupid little young mind, and I would look at that rainbow and always say, "I could go to that." And when I got old enough to realize that's life: you always want to do other things and you look at bigger things.

**00:13:14**

I remember I had a cousin and I would say, "I wish for this, and I wish—" She said, "Don't say that. It's a sin. It's a sin to wish. You don't wish for things." And she really believed that. And I—well, "Why is it a sin for me to wish for this, in my mind?" [*Laughs*] I always wanted bigger things. I guess that's just what people do. I just wanted bigger things. So when I came to work here—now, according to the Creoles of color, the women always worked sewing factories. John, we had any number of sewing factories in New Orleans. I wish we had them today; then there would be a lot of work for women. They had Haspel Brothers, who made the seersucker suits. They had Bunk's, who made the work clothes. They had places like Famous-Sternberg, tailor shops. Everywhere women could sew and make pockets and do things and make men's clothes. And I could sew because I came up with—my mother was a good seamstress and we just sewed everything. What else—we didn't have anything to wear if we didn't make it ourselves.

**00:14:31**

Even our underclothes. I can remember you had these flour sacks. Sara. You'd wash them out good and clean them up and then you'd cut out maybe a slip or something out of that.

**00:14:44**

**John Pope:** Really?

**00:14:45**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, really. You made those underwear, or make a slip out of this, or you'd make the tablecloths. You would starch them and iron them, and my mother believed in embroidering everything and crocheting so she would stamp out something to embroider on the tablecloth and we would embroider them and starch and iron them, and they were pretty. We made pillowcases and all that out of those flour sacks.

**00:15:11**

**Sara Roahen:** What do you mean, "stamp something out?"

**00:15:13**

**Leah Chase:** You know, in those days you could buy a pattern that if you ironed it, then the print would come out. So you would take your needle and thread and you would just embroider it on those lines, you know. If it was a flower or teapot in the kitchen or spoons you would just—. And you would embroider that with different color threads. And then she would take it and crochet the edges. "Oh, here you go." So you learned all of that. **[Laughs]** You learned all of

that. But you learned those kinds of things. And then, John, it was too funny: then after that they started putting the rice—you know, in the country you didn't go to the store every day. You went maybe once a month and you bought a sack of rice. When you got the money you bought the things you needed. You bought a sack of rice, a sack of flour, a sack of sugar, and you put it in the big—I'll never forget what we called a "lard tin." You could buy lard 100 pounds in a big tin, so if you had those tins you washed them out and cleaned them out and that's what you put rice in one, flour in one, sugar in one.

**00:16:28**

And you had that; you didn't go to the grocery all the time. So things came in sacks. So they start making printed material, and you know they started putting flour in [them], and so here you are trying to make up your sacks. **[Laughs]** You would try and say, "Oh, I got this sack," and the sack might be as big as this tablecloth, maybe, by the time you unfold it. And then you know two sacks or three sacks—three yards can make you a good dress. So you would look for those sacks or bags, so you can have a dress, a flour sack dress. **[Laughs]** But who knew? You starched it, ironed it, and here you are.

**00:17:12**

So you learn all of those things coming up in the country.

**00:17:18**

**John Pope:** Was this related to the Depression at all?

**00:17:20**

**Leah Chase:** That was, uh-hm. See, the Great Depression. I was born in, what, '23? And you know I can remember way back. I had a nice little coat. I'll never forget this little coat. And evidently that's when things were good. My daddy was a shipyard worker and they built wooden boats and they had work in the shipyard, but by the time I was six years old in 1929, everything was gone. So you had really rough times. There were no work in the shipyard. My daddy had to work for the WPA for fifty cents a day, you know—.

**00:18:00**

**Sara Roahen:** Yeah? Doing what?

**00:18:01**

**Leah Chase:** He would maybe be digging ditches, doing whatever projects they had for you to work on. And besides you got some help. You got some food help. But it wasn't like it is today. And they had one place that all the food would come in, the flour, the butter. The government always gave you good butter. You know, that's why I don't like margarine today. I came up on good butter [*Laughs*] because the WPA gave you good butter. Butter, flour, some kind of meat in the can or something, and you had to go to this one place and get it.

**00:18:42**

So what did you do? You'd take your little wagon or your little wheelbarrow and you'd go through the town to get your food. So it wasn't very glamorous, so now because that isn't glamorous and everybody was going to know how poor you were you were trying like heck to get off that poverty list. You're praying for work, you're praying to help do that.

**00:19:06**

I'll never forget my daddy said, "We got to hurry up and pray for work and pray and ask God because we don't want to be always dependent and taking things, having things given to us. We can't have that." Because he always said, "If people give you something, they always got you under their thumb. You got to work to get off of that." So we worked to get off of that. You know if you worked housework, I remember you got your little pay. I forget, it was so minimal. And maybe you would stop at the drugstore and you would buy maybe a tube of deodorant. I'll never forget it was called Fresh. It was in a little tube. Or you bought a bar of soap and then you came home and gave the rest to the house. Yeah.

**00:19:53**

**Sara Roahen:** Until you were how old did you do that?

**00:19:56**

**Leah Chase:** Well I left home when I was, what? Eighteen. And I worked since I was sixteen, washing clothes, doing whatever. We all did that, doing whatever. I remember my sister working for a lady [*Laughs*] and the lady said—they used to call her Addie; her name is Adonicia, and this lady used to call her Addie. "Now Addie, I'm going to leave this and you're going to cook this for my dinner tonight. You're going to make these bell peppers." Now it was four of them for dinner. So they had two bell peppers and a piece of bologna sausage about this big [*Gestures*]. It was her job to stuff those bell peppers with bologna sausage, you know.

**00:20:39**

**John Pope:** You do what you knew.

00:20:41

**Leah Chase:** You do what you knew. So she had—she kept, “How am I going to do that?” I said, “Get some onions, get some onions.” *[Laughs]* My daddy used to raise onions and garlic coming out the wazoo. “Get the onions, get the garlic and put it in there.” You had all that. You stuffed the poor little bell peppers. *[Laughs]*

00:20:59

**John Pope:** That sounds—even though this was her employer, it still seemed awfully sad.

00:21:04

**Leah Chase:** It was.

00:21:05

**John Pope:** I mean bell peppers and bologna with onions and—but still.

00:21:08

**Leah Chase:** It was sad but people didn’t have anything, you know, so they made do with what they had to do. But in our community, in the black community, we would never do that. We would have other things. We would have greens, we would have string beans, we would have the pork that we had put down in the lard to preserve it. And I learned since I got older that’s called confit. Confit. So, okay, we were confit-ing pork and didn’t even know we were confit-ing the darned stuff.

**00:21:43**

**John Pope:** Trendy before your time.

**00:21:44**

**Sara Roahen:** So are you saying the black community was better at growing their own things and—

**00:21:50**

**Leah Chase:** Oh they were.

**00:21:50**

**Sara Roahen:** —knowing how to fend for themselves?

**00:21:53**

**Leah Chase:** They were better at growing their own things. Because you see the whites had the jobs. You know, they had whatever it took. Some of them were very poor, like we were; some of them were very poor and they did things, but most of them had jobs or they had things. It was just strange, Sara. When you look at people, like people who are referred to—I had this book, worst title in the world—as poor white trash, but that was the poorer white people. But they had a culture all their own too. They could cook. They could make something out of nothing just like I learned to do. They were doing the same things. They just didn't have the opportunities some

of the others had and you're going to have that in life. Everybody is not going to "have" all your life.

**00:22:47**

But those people, when I look at that book I really—I kind of appreciate whatever. They were themselves and they just did whatever they could do. Like one of them had a catfish salad that means if you had leftover fried catfish you took it, you cut it up, put a little oil and vinegar on it and maybe some onions in it and make you a salad. So you see they were creative because they couldn't waste anything. They had to do—they could catch that catfish out of the river and they could have it and they were not going to waste anything. So it's just life is good if people just look at it in a good way. So those are the things that we have to do today in making people come together. The best way to make people come together is over a plate of food. You learn about their culture. You learn everything about them through their food. Ask them how they cook, ask them what they cook. And you can learn a lot of things.

**00:23:54**

But you learn basic things. I would—sometimes, Sara, our supper was just grits and what we call today caramelized onions. Well it's a big thing today but in my day it was just plain old smothered onions. Put them in a pot. You had a little butter from the WPA—put that in the pot, serve that with grits. That was your supper because you didn't have anything else. Now sweet potato hash is the big thing. Well I've come up on sweet potato hash and cut those sweet potatoes up because that's what your daddy grew, put it in the iron pot, cook it down; that's your supper. Nobody went to bed hungry. You didn't have all the fancy food but you sure didn't go to bed hungry. When you had to play a game at night you played a game, maybe the little putt-putt tops. Daddy would sit and you'd spin the tops, so your prize for that was what you picked up out of

your yard or somebody else's yard: pecans. You had pecan trees all around. So you see you used all of that.

**00:25:03**

I know today now quail—the big thing. When I was coming up the little bobwhite quails would come down in the strawberry patch. You didn't want them in your strawberry patch so you shot them. So you come home, and we had plum trees in the yard, just they were beautiful trees and they made beautiful shades and just an ordinary little old red plum. My mother would make plum jelly, so you know what she'd do with the quail? Take that quail and put it in the iron pot with a little butter on it and glaze it in plum jelly.

**00:25:40**

**John Pope:** Sounds really good.

**00:25:40**

**Leah Chase:** It is good. But at that time we thought [*Laughs*] it was plain old nothing out of—Sara, out of the—. They had a wild grass called purslane. Now that's a succulent kind of grass. I don't see it anymore. I'm going to look for it when I go back to the country. And it has little leaves but it was edible. And you could take that and cook it and it would taste exactly like spinach. So when the crops were not good and we didn't have anything mother would tell you, "Go out and get the purslane." Go around different places and bring it and she would cook it. She said, "Now don't tell this to anybody because they will know we're so poor we're eating this grass." They would know how poor we are.

**00:26:30**

So I grew up and came here and went to California in a place called City's. I'll never forget two women chefs had that plate. I ordered some liver and I said, "Oh my goodness, \$20." Back then, for liver. For \$20 you had a piece of liver on my plate. What was there? Purslane.

[Laughs]

00:26:53

**Sara Roahen:** That's a gourmet food.

00:26:54

**Leah Chase:** [Laughs] Dag-gone it's a gourmet food, and they told me don't tell anybody I'm eating it.

00:26:59

**John Pope:** Trendy before your time, yeah.

00:27:01

**Leah Chase:** Trendy before your time; you were trendy before your time. You knew how to do things. You knew how to make things out of nothing. Trendy before your time. So one day here I said I go way back to those okra. You know daddy raised a lot of okra. My daddy was one, when he planted, he planted plenty. And I said, "Why are you planting all this? It's more than we can eat." "To give away." To give to the neighbors who didn't plant.

00:27:32

**John Pope:** How many acres?

**00:27:33**

**Leah Chase:** Well we had fifteen acres of strawberries and after you turn the strawberries you had fifteen acres peas, crowder peas, because crowder peas was a fertilizer for that strawberry. You'd turn the crowder peas bush under and there was another fertilizer for the ground. And so we had peas after that and maybe you had corn after that. But at home daddy would maybe have about fifteen, twenty rows of okra and that made you gobs of okra. You had bushels of okra. So what you had to do with the okra is go around the neighborhood and pass it around. Sometimes they would give you a dime or so whatever you sold it for—the tomatoes or whatever—but most of the time it was given—. You know, always go give Auntie these okra. Auntie sitting on her porch while I'm wetting these dumb okra. Go give them to Auntie and give the best. With him it's always, "Give your best. Don't give anyway anything that you wouldn't have for yourself." So you had to give them the best. *[Laughs]*

**00:28:41**

**John Pope:** He sounds like quite a role model.

**00:28:43**

**Leah Chase:** He was. Had no education whatsoever, maybe third, fourth grade. My mother maybe had seventh, eighth grade. But they knew how to teach you. My daddy would sit down to that arithmetic. That was his—that what was we called math in those days, arithmetic, and he would sit down at night with us and teach us how to subtract, how to add, how to multiply.

**00:29:08**

**Sara Roahen:** So he knew how to do that without a lot of education, huh?

**00:29:11**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm, uh-hm. And he always told, “You got to learn this because if you don’t know how to count people are going to beat you out of your money.” *[Laughs]*

**00:29:20**

**Sara Roahen:** It’s true.

**00:29:22**

**Leah Chase:** “If you don’t know how to count.” So, Girl, here we were with the times tables. We learned the times tables upside down, backwards, all kinds of ways. After you went 9x1 and you got to 9x12, then you had to go back up: 9x12 and *[Laughs]* you had to really study that. But we made good grades in school, and he did not tolerate a 75. That was a passing grade. No way. You better come home with a ninety or a 100. He wouldn’t tolerate nothing under that. And didn’t know from nothing but taught us basics. The basics. So after we got up, we learned how to do other things.

**00:30:06**

**Sara Roahen:** Did your other siblings come to school in New Orleans also?

**00:30:09**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, most of them except when it got down to the last ones. Then he had kind of relaxed, so they went to Slidell High in Slidell. And those from Yvette down, they got college. Yvette and Janice and all them. But usually you got yourself through that, through high school, and then you had to go to work to help the next one up to that far, you see.

**00:30:40**

**Sara Roahen:** Well I interrupted you earlier when you were going to tell us why you decided to come to the city to work. You know you—after high school you went home and you were working for the boarding house, and then how did it happen that you came back?

**00:30:51**

**Leah Chase:** Because there were no—there was no work you could do, but here you could go in the sewing factory if you wanted to, and in my case—

**00:30:59**

**Sara Roahen:** And that's what you did?

**00:31:00**

**Leah Chase:** No way, Darling. I was so militant when I think about it. I went to work in the French Quarter. First I worked with the Oriental Laundry, and it was where—what was there? Hooligans at one time. It was in the French Quarter. And I took a job and don't know anything because—shake out the sheets. You know, the sheets would come out of the washing machine

and you would have to shake them out and give them to the people to put on the big roller. And here I'm shaking. The lady kept saying, "Don't go so fast, don't go so fast. Because it's never going to run out so take your time." *[Laughs]* I did that for a while but I got this job in a restaurant.

**00:31:40**

**John Pope:** Which one?

**00:31:42**

**Leah Chase:** I went to work for a restaurant called the Colonial Restaurant. And it was where—it was in the 600 or the 500 block of Chartres Street. It was next door to where WDSU used to be. WDSU was five-something—

**00:31:59**

**John Pope:** 520.

**00:32:00**

**Leah Chase:** 520. I worked just a few doors—. Where WDSU was was an icehouse in those days, uh-hm. So I went to work for this and had never been inside a restaurant in my life. Where was I going to go? I didn't have any money. I didn't have anything. And there were no black restaurants to go to and such. So she taught me everything, and I'll never forget this woman. I went there as a waitress and didn't know from nothing. Went there one evening and the lady put me on the floor by myself the next morning.

00:32:41

**Sara Roahen:** What made you go there, to a restaurant?

00:32:44

**Leah Chase:** Because somebody told me that's where I could get a job. I had to get a job. I had to work. You know, nobody to give you anything. If [you're] out of your house you better go somewhere, you know. So that's what they brought me to and I went to work there and it was too funny. You fed everybody in the Quarter and I fed Knute Helena. Did you ever hear of Knute Helena? He was an old artist there. They got plenty of work by Helena. I got a piece somewhere around here by Helena. And he worked there, and there was this man who did miniature drawings, Henry Hobbs. I fed him. All those people—

00:33:35

**Leah Chase:** Fed all those people. There was another man who—Coleman or—. He wrote books or something. I really fed Tennessee Williams in there because, you see, when they tell you that Tennessee Williams liked icebox pie, he ate them right at that restaurant.

00:33:59

**John Pope:** Really?

00:34:00

**Leah Chase:** So you—

**00:34:01****John Pope:** What else did he like?**00:34:02****Leah Chase:** You fed everybody. I fed Doris Duke Cromwell when she came here to—. You know, the rich people would come and give their service during the War. They would do service hours. Doris Duke came to do service hours. And I fed her.**00:34:21****John Pope:** What did she like?**00:34:22****Leah Chase:** Well by that time we were at the Coffee Pot. See, this lady also started the Coffee Pot on St. Peter's Street. It is not where it is now; it started across the street. Then she moved it in 1944—'44 [or something] like that, she moved it to the area where it is now, and it's smaller than what it was when she moved it there. And what she moved into was the old Green Shutter, which they had a lot of teahouses in the Quarter in those days where you'd go and you'd have a cup of tea and they'd read your tealeaves.**00:35:03****John Pope:** What did Doris Duke like to eat?

**00:35:05**

**Leah Chase:** Well at that time she ate just her breakfast, French toast or maybe—people ate what they ate and they ate it every day. Like Mr. Helena, his wife would eat her bowl of gumbo and a cup of coffee and toast. Every day you knew that’s what she was going to get.

**00:35:23**

**John Pope:** What did Tennessee Williams order?

**00:35:25**

**Leah Chase:** The lemon pie.

**00:35:26**

**John Pope:** Just the lemon pie?

**00:35:26**

**Leah Chase:** That’s all I can remember is the lemon pie.

**00:35:35**

**John Pope:** Did he tip well?

**00:35:36**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, everybody gave a little something and tipped but not like they will today. You know if you made \$7 a week or \$8 a week, that was—. John, I started working for \$1 a day. \$1 a day.

**00:35:53**

**Sara Roahen:** Was that a living wage at that time?

**00:35:55**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah. At that time, you worked for \$1 a day. You could buy a fairly decent pair of shoes for \$5; a cheaper pair for \$2.99 or something. And it was coming up wartime so you didn't have leather. You had make-believe materials, you know, like some kind of cloth things. It was a different day. I remember—**[Laughs]** I remember when I was a little girl and Joe—my family all worked for Joe Haskell. My mother, her sisters, and my sisters came up working for Joe Haskell making those seersucker suits. You worked piecework. Either you were a pocket maker, or you set the pockets, or you were this. You did piecework. So I remember I was a little girl then because I had not come to high school yet and I started high school when I was barely thirteen. That's how I got out so early, because you know I was just sixteen years old when I graduated from high school. And I remember Joe Haskell having to account for his money, not paying his taxes or something.

**00:37:12**

And I remember, Sara, this was too funny. I can see myself in my grandmother's kitchen and they're talking about Mr. Joe—because to them he was “Mr. Joe.” They worked with him and that's who he was, Mr. Joe. “Mr. Joe had to go to jail,” or, “Mr. Joe had to do something for

not paying his taxes.” **[Emphasis Added]** You know, for tax default or whatever. And I said—a little girl, I can remember this: “Well why does he have to pay? Because he makes more money. Because he’s got money. Why should he pay?” Everybody should pay something. I remember a little girl saying that, so I was weird. I was weird from a little girl. **[Laughs]**

**00:37:57**

**John Pope:** When did you graduate from waiting on tables to cooking?

**00:38:01**

**Leah Chase:** Only when I came in here. I didn’t do very much cooking. At the Coffee Pot we made hamburgers. I remember the best hamburgers: you put it on the grill, and then when you turned it over you put the top with mustard and then you had the bottom with sweet relish and mayonnaise on it, and maybe if you put a slice of onion or if you wanted it dressed you put the lettuce and tomato. But basically that’s what it was: mustard on one side and mayonnaise and sweet relish on the other side. And that was your hamburger. It was a good hamburger at the Coffee Pot.

**00:38:37**

The Coffee Pot sold hamburgers and that’s all. Sandwiches—just hamburgers and breakfast. Eggs and French toast was a big thing. You’d make that. And we at the Coffee Pot—I remember me saying I worked with two other girls: Lucia, who just died about a year ago. And Lucia Bonnie at that time was nineteen. I was eighteen. And Estelle Plessy was another girl, only sixteen. You hear me, John? We three would run that restaurant.

**00:39:17**

**John Pope:** Was she related to Homer Plessy?

**00:39:19**

**Leah Chase:** I don't know. She might have been. That might have been her ancestor. In those days, John, we didn't know anything. We didn't know anything about Homer Plessy. We didn't know—when I'm telling you we didn't know anything, that means not one—nuttin: n-u-t-t-i-n. You knew nuttin.

**00:39:37**

**Sara Roahen:** But you knew how to run a restaurant?

**00:39:39**

**Leah Chase:** Well we learned.

**00:39:40**

**John Pope:** How? How?

**00:39:41**

**Leah Chase:** From her, from Miss—

**00:39:45**

**Sara Roahen:** What's her name?

00:39:45

**Leah Chase:** Her name was Mrs. Sauveur and her husband was Louis Sauveur and he was over the tax department at City Hall I think, Mr. Sauveur was. But she had that little restaurant and all we served was breakfast, grits and eggs and bacon, and then the hamburgers for lunch. So we said to her one day, “Miss Sauveur, people are tired of hamburgers. Could we put on some plate food, a hot lunch?” Now here’s this woman; she had run a restaurant in the capitol in Baton Rouge and she said, “Yes. If you can do it, yes.” So Lucia Bonnie was there and she was nineteen, so she gets together and we get together. “Okay, what are we going to serve?” We don’t know from nothing. **[Laughs]** First thing, Sara, we served for lunch: Creole wieners and spaghetti. **[Laughs]** You hear me? Those white folks ate the Creole wieners and—. **[Laughs]**

00:40:50

**Sara Roahen:** Did they like it?

00:40:52

**Leah Chase:** Yes, they ate it. They ate those Creole wieners and spaghetti, and that plate I think was fifty cents or sixty cents. So then we were selling our Creole wieners and spaghetti and then we learned how to just take everything—that’s what we did at home, John; that’s what we had at home. **[Laughs]**

00:41:10

**John Pope:** It just sounds so inventive.

**00:41:13**

**Leah Chase:** It sounds crazy [*Laughs*] but she let us do that. And then we would go until we learned to do cabbage and string beans or something. One hot plate a day. We learned that from that woman. But I'll never forget those Creole wieners and spaghetti.

**00:41:32**

**John Pope:** And people bought them.

**00:41:34**

**Leah Chase:** They bought them and they liked them, and it's just wieners put in Creole sauce and served over spaghetti.

**00:41:40**

**John Pope:** What is Creole sauce?

**00:41:41**

**Leah Chase:** Red tomato gravy. Like we use tomato sauce in it. We made a little roux and put onions and garlic and bell pepper in it, and then put the tomatoes with water and seasoned it up. That's it. Put a little fresh thyme in it, maybe herbs in it.

**00:42:00**

**John Pope:** “Creole” has gotten to be so generic. Just sort of mainly red sauce. But you—there’s a little more to it than what you’re saying.

**00:42:09**

**Leah Chase:** That’s all we did to do it, is made that tomato gravy and—

**00:42:13**

**Sara Roahen:** But it starts with the roux?

**00:42:14**

**Leah Chase:** With the roux. Start with the roux, and then after you make your roux and you have it to a light brown—not too dark—then you add your onions and you cook that until your onions melt, and then you add your water. And we had a little maybe thyme leaves and basil leaves or whatever you had, you put it in there, and salt and pepper. That was your Creole wieners, Darling, and they ate them. Those white folks ate those Creole wieners. *[Laughs]* They ate them and they loved them.

**00:42:43**

I’ll never forget one time we had a lady who used to come all the time and she made dolls. I can’t remember her name. She always made dolls. And they had Mrs. Rau who had the antiques. We used to refer to them as—we’d say, “Mrs. Rau and her sister look like church mice,” because they were little ladies and their beautiful blond hair, but their hair was always braided up and put in the twist in the back. And they were little ladies that just went around. But that was Mrs. Rau and her sister. And they had all the money. Mr. Feldman had an antique shop

then. They have another lady who had a big antique shop and she had beautiful daughters. They looked like dolls their skin was so beautiful. But all those people, that they ate those Creole wieners [*Laughs*].

00:43:41

**Sara Roahen:** I would too.

00:43:41

**John Pope:** Would the doll-maker have been Orleana Twitchell Miller?

00:43:46

**Leah Chase:** No, uh-um.

00:43:46

**John Pope:** She did costumes.

00:43:48

**Leah Chase:** She did costumes.

00:43:50

**John Pope:** Great name, and she also did good costumes.

00:43:52

**Leah Chase:** Uh-huh, no, but they—I forgot this lady’s name because we wore—at the Coffee Pot we wore white uniforms with red-checked aprons, and I remember she had a doll made with those red-checked aprons. When you put the apron on you tied it around you; it was like a skirt over and the bib on the apron. You tied it in the back of the apron. And that’s what we wore. But that woman taught me—I loved it. That’s how I came to love the restaurant business. I think it was the people. You know you fed everybody. Everybody came, and I’ll never forget Ricky Alvarez. He was our good customer, and Mrs.—what was her name? Mr. Gold, who had a real estate service there. And Miss Riger who worked for Mr. Gould. Miss Riger was a tall woman, very—she ended up having a restaurant after a while. Dorothy Riger. And she was a big woman and had beautiful red hair, always twisted up. And Sauveur had these stools and she had them and Miss Riger would sit on it and naturally she would spill over the stool. And Mr. Ricky Alvarez was behind her drawing her rear-end on the stool. Drawing her rear-end on the stool. He was weird as he could be. He was weird but had a shock of black hair, and before he died that same chocolate black hair was a shock of gray hair. But he would come and he would draw. Mr. Alvarez would draw Miss Riger’s rear-end.

**00:45:37**

**Sara Roahen:** Did she know?

**00:45:38**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm, uh-hm.

**00:45:40**

**Sara Roahen:** This sounds like it was fun.

**00:45:40**

**Leah Chase:** It was fun. But you learned about people. You just, you just learned about people.

**00:45:48**

**Sara Roahen:** And did you—?

**00:45:48**

**Leah Chase:** And learned to appreciate—you didn't realize what you were doing or who you were serving. You were just doing your job.

**00:45:56**

**Sara Roahen:** Were you consciously thinking that restaurant work might become a lifelong job for you?

**00:46:03**

**Leah Chase:** Not at that time but I always looked at it and I always—the more I did it the more I said, “Oh, I wish I had a restaurant. I wish I had a restaurant.” Now, Estelle had a friend; he was an older man than she was but he really liked her and he liked to play racehorses. And I'll never forget, his name is Ulysses Clayton. I remember that. And Estelle—he would pick up Estelle and take her to the races and we would say, “Okay. I'm going to hold down your end. You can go. You can get off early.” So Estelle would bring her clothes and she liked the—you

know, in those days, Girl, you couldn't go without stockings, and stockings were hard to come by, so you had leg makeup. Estelle would put the leg makeup and they had something you could—if stockings had seams you could mark the back of your leg for a seam.

**00:47:05**

**John Pope:** Oh yeah, this is World War II with nylon rationed.

**00:47:07**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, oh, that was rationed. You didn't have that. So you pretend you had stockings on, and Estelle would get dressed up and he would pick her up and go to the racehorses. Now Sauveur would never see him pick her up, you know, because Miss Sauveur would be watching and never see her. But he would pick her up and take her to the races and Lucia and I would hold onto her end until we closed. We closed at 4:00 or 5:00 in the evening; you know, just a breakfast and lunch thing. But she would go off to the races like that. Estelle was something else. She was so funny. And sometimes she would be perspiring and her legs would be dripping. **[Laughs]** The makeup on her legs. It was just fun like that.

**00:47:56**

But then I learned, "I wish I had this restaurant." Now this man Clayton, he had friends like Rip Roberts who was a black man who had a barroom in the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward, and they were friends and all that. They'd say, "We will put you up in business." "No, my daddy would kill me." I mean you put me up—these men? Put me up in business? Honey, my daddy would kill me for one thing, and then I'm not that stupid. I'm eighteen, nineteen years old, but I ain't crazy. Then

I'll owe you my life. Uh-uh, uh-uh. So I'll keep working in the French Quarter and keep working for Miss Sauveur.

**00:48:38**

But I always wanted a restaurant. And that's how they come to make that little movie, *Tiana* with the frog and the princess, based on my life, because I always thought that it was so good. [Interviewer's note: the movie is "The Princess and the Frog."] You met people; you worked and you met all kinds of people. People were fun and they were good.

**00:48:59**

**Sara Roahen:** Did you have black customers at the Coffee Pot?

**00:49:02**

**Leah Chase:** No indeed, Girl. If they were black they didn't know they were black.

**00:49:06**

**Sara Roahen:** And that didn't bother you?

**00:49:08**

**Leah Chase:** No. No. No, you had to live in those days Sara. You know, I tell everybody. Everybody worked for white people. And it didn't bother me. And people would say, "Well Leah, what did you do when you couldn't go to DH Homes and buy this—?" I didn't have any money anyway so it didn't hurt me.

00:49:28

**John Pope:** What was it like to be the inspiration for “The Princess and the Frog?”

00:49:31

**Leah Chase:** Unbelievable. That was fun. For me, life has been fun. I don’t understand how I got what I got; I just did what my daddy said do every day: pray, work, do for others. And it got me this far.

00:49:48

**John Pope:** How did you get here, to Dooky’s?

00:49:50

**Leah Chase:** [*Laughs*] That’s another story, how I got here to Dooky’s. Okay, you know I liked to go out. I was one who couldn’t—I never could sit still, and I think that’s what pains me about aging. I don’t like staying still. I like moving. I like doing things. So I like to go out with different people. Just go out. And then I was out and about town, and then everybody would go—I never was a one-man person. I never had like young girls have a boyfriend. No, I had plenty friends, and we’re going to go out. We’re going to go out and look around and drink and have a little drink here.

00:50:36

And sometimes go out until four o'clock in the morning, Sara. And when you hit that clock at 7:00, I never missed a day’s work and never was late for a day’s work. But you do that and you would just go out and that’s what people did in those days. It wasn’t like they do today:

every time you turn around they got to jump into bed with this man and—uh-uh. People just went out and had a good time. Ate, drank, and had a good time.

**00:51:01**

**John Pope:** How did that get you here to Dooky's?

**00:51:01**

**Leah Chase:** Then [*Laughs*] I got here—I used to come here after I'd get off of work and come to eat. But then I didn't even know Dooky then.

**00:51:13**

**Sara Roahen:** Eat what? What would you eat?

**00:51:16**

**Leah Chase:** Here? They had steak. They used to serve what is a calf steak now, like a porterhouse steak. I would eat the steak and I would say, "Cut it up for me," because they didn't always have a sharp knife in the restaurant. So I'd say, "Cut it in the kitchen." And one time, I'll never forget—my mother-in-law used to laugh about that too—this lady who was working in the kitchen that don't know from nothing about nothing, she just chopped it up and threw it on a plate like a plate of stew. [*Laughs*] My mother-in-law used to always laugh about that. Here she comes with that.

**00:51:47**

Dooky was a musician so I met him when he was playing music, and he'll tell you that himself. I was at a dance and I was popular because I was good-looking and had a fairly good shape. I had everything going. So I'm in the hall dancing, and he'll tell you that. So he said take over this, Man, I'm going to dance with this girl. **[Laughs]**

**00:52:13**

**Sara Roahen:** Where was that? Where was that?

**00:52:14**

**Leah Chase:** It was a place called the Labor Union Hall. Where was it now?

**John Pope:** On Tchoupitoulas.

**Leah Chase:** On Tchoupitoulas, uh-huh, yeah.

**00:52:23**

**John Pope:** There's—

**00:52:23**

**Leah Chase:** It was on Tchoupitoulas Street.

**00:52:27**

**John Pope:** It's uptown. It's not far from the F & M Patio [Bar].

00:52:30

**Sara Roahen:** Okay.

00:52:30

**Leah Chase:** Yeah. And so Dooky got off the band and we started dancing and I still, “I ain’t paying him no mind. I still got all these other boyfriends.” [*Laughs*] And at that time I didn’t like musicians. I thought they were all weird and crazy. I liked people in sports. So Beau Jack was a friend of mine. Beau Jack was then the world’s lightweight champion [in boxing]. I had all those friends who were baseball, maybe football—not football, baseball. Boxing was the big thing with me. I thought boxing was—I still think it was a great sport; not anymore. I think it’s past its time now.

00:53:06

But I got introduced to boxing through my grandfather. He called me in one day and he said, “I want you to look at this man.” It’s a picture of Joe Louis. And he said, “This man can beat *anybody* in the world.” I thought that was fascinating. Who is this that’s so powerful, so strong, that they can beat anybody in the world?

00:53:33

**John Pope:** The Brown Bomber.

00:53:34

**Leah Chase:** The Brown Bomber. It was Joe Louis. And I remember Joe Louis visiting St. Mary's Academy when he was married to Marva, and I met Joe Louis.

**00:53:42**

**John Pope:** And? Was it wonderful?

**00:53:45**

**Leah Chase:** It was wonderful. I thought he was dynamic. He was just a big man, but I—he and his wife came. You know, you just met him but you just—and then you learn and you meet other boxers. Other boxers, and you look at this game and boxing was a beautiful thing in those days. It was an art. They had a black boxer named Johnny Bratton, and they had the Docusen Brothers. Just to look at them work was like a class act to me. It was just so professional to be a boxer.

**00:54:23**

**John Pope:** Well, so you were dancing with this musician whom you had—something clicked.

**00:54:30**

**Leah Chase:** So he kept on so then he started—we started going out. And that was it. I knew Dooky maybe four or five months when we were married. Dooky was only eighteen years old.

**00:54:42**

**Sara Roahen:** How old were you then?

**00:54:43**

**Leah Chase:** Twenty-three.

**00:54:45**

**John Pope:** Whoa, you cougar you, going after younger men.

**00:54:48**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm, twenty-three. I didn't feel like he was any younger. He had been with the band since he was sixteen years old.

**00:54:54**

**John Pope:** What instrument?

**00:54:55**

**Leah Chase:** Trumpet. He had a big band on the road when he was sixteen years old. He was way ahead of his time.

**00:55:02**

**John Pope:** So when you married him, whose idea was it that you were going to work here?

**00:55:08**

**Leah Chase:** Mine. Because Dooky, you know, one day we were talking, and he would come to work here because his daddy made him work here. His daddy more than his mother made him

work. So he would come here and he would work the bar at that time. He was good on the bar, too. Didn't drink a thing but could make you the best drink you ever drank. He didn't smoke, didn't do anything. I think that's what caused him to leave the music world. He couldn't cope with that element. He just couldn't do it.

**00:55:44**

So but he had all these talented musicians in his band. He just had it going for music.

**00:55:52**

**John Pope:** What was the name of the band?

**00:55:53**

**Leah Chase:** Dooky Chase's Orchestra, uh-hm. So and that's how I met Dooky. And then we got married.

**00:56:01**

**John Pope:** Where did his name come from?

**00:56:02**

**Leah Chase:** Don't ask me. You know you get nicknames, and his father—that was his father's nickname and everybody—. His father was very popular. His father was a lottery vendor. He would go around selling—

**00:56:14**

**John Pope:** Really?

**00:56:15**

**Leah Chase:** Yes, that's how he made his money. Away from here in your neck of the woods they're called what? Numbers runners, huh? Not here in New Orleans. Darling, we're very sophisticated. Lottery vendors we were. [*Laughs*]

**00:56:31**

**John Pope:** Sara and I were talking about this. Nicknames fascinate me, but I always try to find out why.

**00:56:39**

**Leah Chase:** How did they get them? I don't know. Either you're Junior, you're Bubba, you're somebody—you're Moon, Dutch. Some child gives you that. I think children put those names on people.

**00:56:52**

**John Pope:** But you can't give yourself a nickname.

**00:56:53**

**Leah Chase:** You can't give yourself a nickname. Somebody else does.

**00:56:56**

**John Pope:** Did you know Jack Kelleher?

**00:56:59**

**Leah Chase:** No.

**00:57:02**

**John Pope:** Her name was Nellie Mae, but she hung out with girls who took boys' nicknames when they were growing up.

**00:57:04**

**Leah Chase:** Oh really?

**00:57:05**

**John Pope:** So Nellie Mae because Jack Kelleher for the rest of her life. She has a daughter named Jackeen.

**00:57:11**

**Leah Chase:** Really? I'll be darned. You know children, like you say, give you nicknames. So I think my father-in-law's sisters gave him that nickname, Dooky.

**00:57:19**

**John Pope:** So this is an ancestral thing.

**00:57:23**

**Sara Roahen:** He was an Edgar.

**00:57:24**

**Leah Chase:** He was an Edgar.

**00:57:25**

**Sara Roahen:** And was he the first Edgar or did—?

**00:57:27**

**Leah Chase:** My father-in-law was, uh-huh.

**00:57:30**

**Sara Roahen:** He wasn't named after his own father?

**00:57:30**

**Leah Chase:** No. His father's name was—what was his father's name when I think about it? It wasn't Edgar. He had a brother named Charlie and he had a brother named Sam. What was his father's name? I can't remember that.

**00:57:49**

**Sara Roahen:** Well how many Dookys are there now—Edgar Dookys—in your family?

00:57:54

**Leah Chase:** Living, four.

00:57:56

**Sara Roahen:** And your father-in-law was five.

00:57:57

**Leah Chase:** My father-in-law was the first. He would have been five; then my husband. And nicknames grow on you. You know names—and I always say this: names does not make the man. Man makes the name. So you see my father-in-law was very popular. He's a lottery vendor. He knows everybody. He used to gamble. Couldn't gamble worth a dime. Lose the money my mother-in-law would make, poor thing, and she had to go back and hustle up some more. But she loved Dooky. And if Dooky did that he would go on Rampart Street and lose the money and she would just come back in here and make some more. And she had a little shop across the street at that time.

00:58:38

**Sara Roahen:** So their restaurant or sandwich shop wasn't in this location right here? It was across the street?

00:58:45

**Leah Chase:** It was across the street at first but they didn't stay there long. They started there in '39, but by '41 my mother-in-law was a mover and shaker. She was a great money manager. I

never could do that. She was a great money manager. And my father-in-law was always sick. He had ulcers. He had been operated on a zillion times for ulcers. And he had ulcers and then that's how she come to—he quit going out selling the lottery because he couldn't do it anymore. He was always having surgery for those ulcers. So she opened up that little shop and they sold the lottery out of the shop.

**00:59:25**

**Sara Roahen:** As well as food?

**00:59:26**

**Leah Chase:** As well as sandwiches, uh-huh. Then she moved—she bought this over here and she lived in this side here and the restaurant was next door.

**00:59:37**

**John Pope:** What was your role when you married Dooky, when you walked in? Were you a cook, chef?

**00:59:45**

**Leah Chase:** When I came in here I thought I was going to be a waitress like I was. [*Laughs*] Where I came from I was a waitress and a good one. And I loved to wait tables. And I was coming up with ideas and they didn't know where I was coming from. Like even the shrimp cocktail, Sara. Black people did not know what a shrimp cocktail was when I came here in 1946.

They didn't. But what was—they didn't know that. Where were they going to eat it? They didn't have no place else to eat it.

**01:00:17**

**John Pope:** Well that's—

**01:00:17**

**Leah Chase:** So then I had to start doing that.

**01:00:19**

**John Pope:** Were they okay with your ideas?

**01:00:22**

**Leah Chase:** Not all the time, no. The people used to tell my mother-in-law, “Oh, she's going to ruin your business. You see that girl? She's going to ruin it.” But my mother-in-law was making money in here in '45. Everybody was making money by '45. You know things were booming and people were making—had jobs then. And my mother-in-law was making money and she was strange with money. She loved money and she always had her roll in her bosom like everybody did. My mother-in-law walked around with about \$500 in her bosom. Oh yeah, she wasn't happy unless she had that roll of money in her bosom now. No way, Honey. Emily had to—she'd pull out that money in her bosom, yeah. *[Laughs]*

**01:01:13**

**Sara Roahen:** I like that.

**01:01:14**

**Leah Chase:** And she would sit down there, I remember, with a cigar box, Sara. And in those days people were working—if they worked on the river, or they worked anywhere, they came to cash their check. And she had her money, \$6,000--\$7,000 in her cigar box. And she'd cash those checks sitting right out there on the table with the cigar box.

**01:01:37**

**John Pope:** So you had these ideas—food ideas—based on your time in the Quarter?

**01:01:40**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, my time in the Quarter. And I said—I'll never forget this boo-boo I made: I said, "Now, nothing is different. The only difference in people is the color of their skin." Now that was stupid. There are different cultures and different—. So here, I'm going to put—the first thing I put on the menu to change: lobster Thermidor. Well [*Laughs*]—

**01:02:04**

**John Pope:** Woo-wee.

**01:02:04**

**Leah Chase:** The people said, "Is she crazy? Emily, she is going to ruin your business, everything you worked for. She's going to ruin your—." But my mother-in-law, she supported

me 100 percent. Because they thought, “This is an older girl marrying this boy. This is not going to work. It’s not going to work.”

**01:02:22**

**John Pope:** Did the lobster Thermidor go over well?

**01:02:26**

**Leah Chase:** No, it didn’t go because black people were not introduced to cream sauces at that time. Where would they have cream sauces unless they worked in a restaurant? They wouldn’t have nothing like that. They would have stews, they would have plenty of meat, they would have stuffing, oyster dressing, they would have mirlitons, they would have things like that but they would never have lobster Thermidor. They would never have shrimp Newburg. They would never have those things. They never had a shrimp cocktail.

**01:02:56**

**John Pope:** So you’ve got this thing going on here. Part of it is making people feel comfortable with what they have to do, but also a good restaurateur should introduce them to new stuff. How did you balance that?

**01:03:14**

**Leah Chase:** [*Laughs*] Well I had to back up, you know. So okay, that didn’t work. Obviously that didn’t work. That was too funny though. So I backed up. And the first real—because when I came here my mother-in-law had a piece of paper like this and this was her menu: fried chicken,

fried fish, and you know we used to get those little trout, three-quarters or a pound, and split them open and you'd fry it whole and you would serve it whole like that. Just split and fry it whole with the head on and all.

**01:03:47**

**Sara Roahen:** With bones and everything?

**01:03:48**

**Leah Chase:** With bones and everything.

**01:03:49**

**John Pope:** With crabmeat on top?

**01:03:51**

**Leah Chase:** We didn't know nothing about crabmeat on top.

**01:03:53**

**John Pope:** Sorry.

**01:03:55**

**Leah Chase:** You put the crabmeat and the stuffing in the stuffed crab. We didn't know nothing about sauces with the crabmeat on the top.

01:04:02

**John Pope:** It's promising.

01:04:03

**Leah Chase:** I had to create all that. [*Laughs*]

01:04:05

**John Pope:** But again, how did you get folks to follow you where you were leading?

01:04:10

**Leah Chase:** Well where I was leading I got folks to follow me by backing up. So then when I made a real menu that people could understand rather than what my mother-in-law was writing, I start making lunch once a day—meatballs and spaghetti or something. And then when it—I said, “We got to have dinner,” and then I made a dinner menu and I’d give them what they had: grillades, jambalaya, gumbo, veal panée, stuffed chicken breast with oyster dressing. See, they knew that. They knew that. That was something they could relate to. So I had to back up and do that.

01:04:52

**John Pope:** Did you ever put anything special on there, too, just to give them an idea? Or did you stick with—?

01:04:58

**Leah Chase:** I stuck with that until eventually you could put something special, and I'm still doing that today. I'm still trying to—like salmon. Now you know people are not big on salmon but I'm—

**01:05:09**

**Sara Roahen:** I am.

**01:05:10**

**Leah Chase:** I love it, too. Oh I got to get you—cook some of the salmon the man sent me from Alaska. So now I'm working on introducing them to salmon. So I'll do salmon with falafel mix and they never heard of that. So I put that on and put some olive oil and bake that off. It's good. Or, I'll first make it—

**01:05:31**

**Sara Roahen:** Where did you have that? How did you know how to make that?

**01:05:33**

**Leah Chase:** Oh I don't know. Just things cross your mind.

**01:05:35**

**John Pope:** Sounds wonderful.

**01:05:37**

**Leah Chase:** You're just crossing your mind with food. You don't know. You see when you're a foodie you're thinking about food. In your mind you're creating food.

**01:05:45**

**Sara Roahen:** Well Leah, was that—I'm confused because at the Coffee Pot it was a pretty basic food. Like you didn't have shrimp cocktail and lobster Thermidor there.

**01:05:56**

**Leah Chase:** I had it at The Colonial though before.

**01:05:58**

**Sara Roahen:** Oh okay. So that's how you knew that food?

**01:06:01**

**Leah Chase:** Colonial, uh-hm, at the Colonial. And we had something called—what you call shrimp Arnaud with just a remoulade sauce, uh-huh. So we had that; we had shrimp Colonial. And it's just a remoulade sauce. So you learn how to make that sauce and you use it and you use the shrimp cocktail. I had to introduce them to even setting a table up here, Sara.

**01:06:31**

**John Pope:** What did they—what was it like before then?

**01:06:35**

**Leah Chase:** Before then when you came—

**01:06:37**

**John Pope:** Before you were setting the table?

**01:06:39**

**Leah Chase:** When you came in this restaurant you found this restaurant just like it is now, this room, but it was from that door out there to back there [*Gestures*] and you had plastic tablecloths on the table. You had ketchup bottles. You had hot sauce bottles on the table. And you had your waitress that sat in that corner. When you came in she gave you this piece of paper and you took the order and then you set the table up. You gave her a fork and a knife and a paper napkin as she—as they—came in.

**01:07:17**

Now that's another thing they said: "Nobody is going to eat with this silver on this table." Black people were strange about restaurants because, you see, in their minds they had been brainwashed that restaurants were not clean. They didn't—. Look, that's how they kept us safe from segregation. You don't want to eat there. They didn't tell you you couldn't eat there because you were black. "You don't want to eat there because they're not clean. All of those people drink out of the same glass. You don't want—."

**01:07:47**

**Sara Roahen:** So that you don't feel bad about not being allowed to?

**01:07:51**

**Leah Chase:** I didn't.

**01:07:53**

**Sara Roahen:** Like your parents would say that to protect you?

**01:07:55**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah. I didn't feel bad. I didn't have any money anyway.

**01:07:59**

**John Pope:** But this was—that's amazing. That's an amazing story.

**01:08:03**

**Leah Chase:** As late as '46. And so I said, "I am setting up this table." So if you go at it and you're still using the plastic stuff and you're putting the fork and the knife where it belongs and you're putting the napkin where it belongs. And then I said, "Oh no, we can't use this paper. I can't have this paper in here. We have to use cloth. We have to—." That's what I saw on the other side of the town. Well they thought I was crazy.

**01:08:30**

And Sara—

**01:08:30**

**John Pope:** Why?

01:08:31

**Leah Chase:** Because they thought it was not clean. They didn't understand that you sterilize things in the restaurant. They would never go in the restaurant so how are they going to know that? They're not going to know that.

01:08:44

**John Pope:** How did word get out about your being a quality establishment?

01:08:50

**Leah Chase:** Well it grows. You know we always had the—because my mother-in-law and father-in-law were popular so the people would come out, but it was like a Saturday night space. Black folks ate dinner at home. They didn't eat out. They came out to drink. And they would drink—. If you were three people and you drank maybe bourbon, you'd say, "Give me a setup." You know what a setup was? A half a pint of bourbon, whatever bourbon you ordered, and black folks didn't order cheap bourbon. They liked good stuff. So they put the bourbon—yeah, they didn't drink Early Times. I'll tell you another story about Early Times. They didn't drink that. No indeed. They had to drink I.W. Harper or Old Forester 100 [Proof], all that kind of stuff. They drank good stuff. And you would get the bucket of ice, the little pan of ice, and your glass and maybe a Coke and a 7-Up and your half-pint, and that way. Now if you wanted your setup dressed, you'd say, "Give me my ice dressed." So that means on top of that ice I'd put lemon and cherries.

**01:10:00**

**John Pope:** On the ice?

**01:10:01**

**Leah Chase:** I'd dress the ice so when you made your drink at the table you put your lemon and your cherry in your drink.

**01:10:08**

**Sara Roahen:** I want to go do that now.

**01:10:10**

**John Pope:** I've never heard of that.

**01:10:11**

**Leah Chase:** And dressed ice.

**01:10:13**

**Sara Roahen:** So Dooky Chase's had that. Y'all had that here?

**01:10:16**

**Leah Chase:** Everybody had that who had a barroom.

**01:10:18**

**John Pope:** John Scott [the artist] told me once that this was where he and his family always came to celebrate.

**01:10:25**

**Leah Chase:** They did.

**01:10:26**

**John Pope:** So how did you advance to the status where this was an event place for birthdays, christenings?

**01:10:35**

**Leah Chase:** From the get-go because you see other little places that served food didn't have people running it like my father-in-law and my mother-in-law. They were Creoles of color and that was unusual for a Creole of color to open up a restaurant.

**01:10:55**

**John Pope:** Why?

**01:10:55**

**Leah Chase:** Creoles ate at home. They did everything at home. So the Creoles could understand this place. This was somebody they knew, somebody they could relate to, and if Emily was cooking for them like frying her fish or frying her oysters, they trusted in Emily so they—. And my father-in-law was a stickler. He would come and he would be dressed

meticulous. He was meticulous—not like my husband. He was meticulous, Honey. Every year he changed the four things: his car, his rings, his stickpin, and his watch.

**01:11:34**

**Sara Roahen:** He got new ones?

**01:11:36**

**Leah Chase:** Every year you change that, Darlin'. You take it to the jewelry shop and you get your diamond ring. All black men had a diamond ring, a diamond stickpin, and a watch with diamonds in it.

**01:11:50**

**John Pope:** That's a status thing.

**01:11:52**

**Leah Chase:** It was a status thing. Every black man had that—had a stickpin—and that was my father-in-law.

**01:12:00**

**Sara Roahen:** And he and your mother-in-law, it sounds like they were behind you making changes. Was your husband?

**01:12:08**

**Leah Chase:** I don't think. No, Dooky went along with me with whatever. But his mother is who I had to change. Not so much in the food thing, but in the décor. My mother-in-law was a pink and blue person. I hate pink and blue. I hate pink and blue. But that's what she was, so this dining room was maybe—and they didn't know. They just put the decorations. And her chairs were these—you know these comb chairs, you had? They were made like with a comb back and maybe a little stuffed back and the legs went like this [*Gestures*]. Like you know they were sitting on the legs—

01:12:51

**John Pope:** Swept-back.

01:12:51

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, swept-back. That's what she had in here. So when I came in and I wanted to change, "Oh no, we can't have that." If ever there was one thing I remember wishing for in the French Quarters, not so much going in the restaurant but they had a restaurant and it finally wound up being the first Brennan's. It was called the Vieux Carré. And in the Vieux Carré, I would pass there every day and see those chairs. Boy those chairs. I [*Laughs*] just went and I got those chairs way back there.

01:13:25

**Sara Roahen:** You got those chairs?

01:13:25

**Leah Chase:** I got those chairs.

**01:13:27**

**John Pope:** With the décor you sort of—it's a first impression. I mean you walk in and you see cloth, you see silver, glassware. It creates an impression that you think, "This is good."

**01:13:39**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah.

**01:13:41**

**John Pope:** It's not like something where you would walk in and the waiter [is] just watching their watch until you can—.

**01:13:46**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm, it was just that was the décor. I had to take this of the wall. They had little—my mother-in-law used to get Lucian Barbarin. Lucian Barbarin made floats and things like that in the black community and he was put plastic tinsel hanging up for the curtains. They had three windows there. You see that was the décor. And they had these little strings of plastic hanging up or something he had drawn and put on the wall. And pink walls. And I'll never forget the bar had black paper with pink elephants on it.

**01:14:21**

**John Pope:** Huge.

**01:14:23**

**Leah Chase:** [*Laughs*] So—

**01:14:23**

**John Pope:** When did you start cooking back here?

**01:14:25**

**Leah Chase:** I started in the kitchen when I came here. I didn't know anything so I started doing just whatever they did in the kitchen. And then I decided, "Well wait, we got to change." You know people had—men began to have office jobs like lawyers like Dutch [Morial] and those people. And they began to have professional jobs. So that's when I changed and we had to start getting lunches at first, making lunches. And then we started to put the dinner menu on you know because people were beginning to eat out and to—

**01:15:03**

**Sara Roahen:** You mean black people?

**01:15:04**

**Leah Chase:** Black people. But for some uncanny reason from time to time we always had white people. Like Jim Dumbrowski, Ben Smith. Well I knew Ben Smith before the ACLU. You know Ben used to—and Dooky would throw him out.

**01:15:23**

**John Pope:** Why?

**01:15:24**

**Leah Chase:** Because they'd be drinking too much and Dooky would say, "Y'all got to go. Y'all got to go. Y'all are drinking too much. You're drinking too much. You got to go." [*Laughs*]

**01:15:32**

**Sara Roahen:** Who were these people in the white community and—?

**01:15:35**

**Leah Chase:** I'm telling you: Jim Dumbrowski, Ben Smith.

**01:15:37**

**Sara Roahen:** I don't know what they did though.

**01:15:39**

**Leah Chase:** Jim Dumbrowski was a—I don't know. He worked with civil rights but he worked more with the labor union. He was trained at the school called the Highlander School in Tennessee, the same as Virginia Durr and those people, and Rosa Parks. That sit-in thing was not accidental. That was a plant for Rosa Parks. She was trained to do that at the Highlander School. So they trained you to do passive work, to create unions passively. So Jim Dumbrowski was here to create unions for the Godchaux sugar company, for the sugar people.

**01:16:22**

And I'll never forget: they would meet upstairs. Now upstairs was a room that could maybe hold fifty people. One day I had them coming through the ceiling. They had about seventy-five people up there with Jim Dumbrowski and his union people. *[Laughs]*

**01:16:35**

**John Pope:** Now how did you—I've heard you say there was some sort of law that forbade black people and white people to meet?

**01:16:41**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, that was against the law.

**01:16:42**

**John Pope:** How did you get by this?

**01:16:45**

**Leah Chase:** That I don't know, how we got by that. How they didn't trouble me on that. The only reason I could think they didn't do that because my father-in-law was so popular. Everybody knew Dooky was a lottery vendor, and not only that. You know we had white policemen. We didn't have black policemen. And the white policemen—two or three who would do the beat around here—would you know they knew it and they would come in and they knew my father-in-law through the gambling thing. Gambling was never legal. It was always illegal but the policemen knew what was what and they knew certain people and they knew my father-

in-law. Then not only that. My mother-in-law would come—she liked to give things; she was worse than me. The policemen would come in, [and she would say] “Bebé, I’m going to fix you a nice little sandwich, Bébé.” And you know today you couldn’t do that. That would be called a bribe. But she honestly did it because she just appreciated. She would make them a sandwich and they’d have a cold drink and then they would go.

**01:17:57**

**Sara Roahen:** Well I know that you were and are sort of a trailblazer when it comes to race relations. Like you’re very open and courageous I think. Your in-laws must have sort of been like that too if they didn’t—they welcomed—

**01:18:13**

**Leah Chase:** They didn’t understand me at all.

**01:18:14**

**Sara Roahen:** No?

**01:18:14**

**Leah Chase:** You know because [*Laughs*] we’d have to—even in the ‘60s I was always told that: I was told so many times, “You can’t. You can’t do this. Oh, you can’t do that.” And don’t ever do that, Sara, because I’m ninety-one, almost ninety-two, now. Don’t tell me I can’t because I’m going to go out there and show you I can.

**01:18:39**

**John Pope:** What did they say you couldn't do?

**01:18:40**

**Leah Chase:** Well I couldn't bring white people in here. "No white people are going to come in here, Leah. You can't do that."

**01:18:47**

**Sara Roahen:** Because they didn't want them in here or they just thought it was impossible?

**01:18:50**

**Leah Chase:** They thought it was impossible. They thought no white person would appreciate anything that we had.

**01:18:58**

**John Pope:** But it's good food.

**01:19:00**

**Leah Chase:** It's good food, but nobody thought that. So you know what I'd do? Okay, I'd get in here and I'd do what I have to do in here and then I'd work the total community. That was unbelievable. See, for one thing blacks would not even think about giving something to a white organization. They wouldn't think about that.

**01:19:22**

**John Pope:** Such as which organization?

**01:19:23**

**Leah Chase:** So anyone, like if I did something for the museum, “Oh Leah, that’s white people.” No, they didn’t understand that. Like giving to white things, and they didn’t understand that. So I did those things, so thereby I’m bringing the people in.

**01:19:40**

**John Pope:** How did you and the civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King and Thurgood Marshall come together?

**01:19:48**

**Leah Chase:** Well they would come here to eat for one thing.

**01:19:51**

**John Pope:** And so this was not any special—?

**01:19:55**

**Leah Chase:** It was not any special—. I had a group of cadets in here from—where is the academy?

**01:20:01**

**John Pope:** West Point?

**01:20:02**

**Leah Chase:** West Point the other day, and they said I understand that CLC [Interviewer's note: Mrs. Chase was unclear about the exact name of this group, but it may have been the Christian Leadership Conference.] was formed upstairs. And I said, "It was." It was. This was the only place black people had to meet besides churches. So they would come and they would meet and they would organize here. You know I would feed them. They would go out and do whatever they had to do. People my age thought they were crazy as bats. You know, who wanted a child to go to jail? Who wants this and who wants that? And who is going to go? And not only that. Through the NAACP, with Thurgood Marshall, who I fed every time he hit New Orleans, Thurgood would come here and work with A. P. Tureaud. Now A. P. Tureaud was a great man, a sweetheart of a man. But with A. P. Tureaud, he didn't believe in offending you because if I'd be ugly, if I do things like the '60s they did, I would be hurting, I would be offending those white people. And he thought he could change the system without even hurting your feelings.

**01:21:11**

**John Pope:** You got to break an egg to have an omelet.

**01:21:14**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, yeah.

**01:21:15**

**John Pope:** So what did Thurgood Marshall like to eat?

**01:21:18**

**Leah Chase:** Gumbo. Gumbo, and you know he would eat his gumbo here, and he loved boiled seafood, so I didn't have boiled seafood. We didn't eat boiled seafood in my restaurant because—anyway. So he would go to Nathaniel Byrd's house. Nathaniel Byrd ran the NAACP in New Orleans. And after he'd eat his gumbo he'd go to Nate Byrd and Mil Byrd's house and they'd put paper on the floor. And he would have his crawfish and his boiled crabs.

**01:21:44**

**John Pope:** What did Dr. King like?

**01:21:45**

**Leah Chase:** You know Dr. King was a strange man. He didn't eat a lot of places like other people did. It's like Martin King had so much on his mind. He was an unbelievable person. He would come here with Judge Augustine, Dr. Mitchell, who was an eye doctor that would come here. And they would come here and maybe have a gumbo, bowl of gumbo—big on gumbo. Everybody was big on gumbo and things like that. But King was—you could see where he died. His food was at his—what was his bedside. You know he'd eat on the run. He wasn't one to sit down. It's like the man had a lot of things on his mind all the time.

**01:22:36**

**John Pope:** Food was more like fuel.

01:22:38

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, it was.

01:22:39

**John Pope:** A source of fuel.

01:22:41

**Leah Chase:** Now Big Daddy King was different. Big Daddy King was his daddy.

01:22:44

**John Pope:** I met him.

01:22:44

**Leah Chase:** You met—? I loved Big Daddy King. He would come in here big and sit down.

“Sister, I want you to come and cook for me.” “No, I’m not coming to cook for you.” [*Laughs*]

01:22:55

**John Pope:** What did he eat?

01:22:56

**Leah Chase:** He liked barbeque, he liked fried chicken. Big Daddy King liked that barbeque and he liked fried chicken and things like that. And they all liked the gumbo. But it was good feeding him. I loved him to death. He was so sweet and he was so nice.

**01:23:11**

**John Pope:** He gave the benediction at the 1976 Democratic Convention and he talked about his son and Robert F. Kennedy how they're not just dead; they're just gone upstairs. And at the end we all held hands and sang "We Shall Overcome" and cried. [*Laughs*]

**01:23:29**

**Leah Chase:** I tell you, I met these people and he was such a sweetheart. He was just a lovely man. I'll always remember Big Daddy King. I will always remember a black theologian called Howard Thurman.

**01:23:43**

**John Pope:** Yes.

**01:23:45**

**Leah Chase:** Howard Thurman was a man who passed my way twice in his life. He had married a lady who looked just like an East Indian lady. She was brown skin with straight black hair, and he was black as my pants. But brilliant man, great man. He wrote a lot of inspirational things. Howard Thurman. Do you know who introduced me to a lot of people? Sam Cooke.

**01:24:14**

**John Pope:** Oh yeah, the singer?

**01:24:14**

**Sara Roahen:** Yeah?

**01:24:15**

**Leah Chase:** No, Sam Cooke, the President of Dillard.

**01:24:18**

**John Pope:** Oh okay. I was thinking—

**01:24:19**

**Sara Roahen:** Me, too.

**01:24:21**

**Leah Chase:** Well Sam Cooke came through here too, and I fed them all—fed all the singers.

Everybody who came, Lena Horne, everybody.

**01:24:25**

**John Pope:** What did Lena Horne like? What did Lena Horne eat?

**01:24:29**

**Leah Chase:** Beautiful. She loved fried chicken. She had—

**01:24:32**

**John Pope:** Not a spare pound on her. How did she do it?

**01:24:34**

**Leah Chase:** She ate that fried chicken and sometimes Lena would call up, “Leah, bring me the fried chicken to the hotel.” I’d bring her fried chicken to the hotel. Lena was somebody else. You know she would talk to you, so she knew all the things I would do. I was cooking here and I was doing this, and you know right in this room she sat and she said, “And what do you do?” That’s what she asked Dooky: “And what do you do?” *[Laughs]*

**01:25:02**

**John Pope:** Too funny.

**01:25:02**

**Leah Chase:** Lena was something else. She would do things and she was sincere about everything she did. She was really sincere about it and a sweetheart of a person. Sara Vaughn liked stuffed crabs. We always had to make stuffed crabs. Sara would come here; she was too funny. And that’s when they started letting blacks entertain at the Blue Room. And that’s when blacks could start going in the Blue Room—

**01:25:30**

**Sara Roahen:** At the Roosevelt Hotel?

**01:25:31**

**Leah Chase:** At the Roosevelt. Sara would come here and they had Krauss [Department] Store. Sara would rent a room at the Richelieu and she would rent a suite there and bring her sewing machine with her. Bring her little portable sewing [machine]. Go to Krauss and buy her some material, and you'd see Sara on the stage that night with that dress, yeah. **[Laughs]**

**01:25:55**

**John Pope:** Did you ever serve Judge Constance Baker Motley?

**01:25:58**

**Leah Chase:** Oh Lord, did I, because that's where she used to eat right here when she was bringing James Meredith to get in Ole Miss.

**01:26:06**

**John Pope:** Yes. She told her story—.

**01:26:08**

**Leah Chase:** I used to feed her every day. Every day.

**01:26:10**

**John Pope:** I heard her at a workshop at Tulane talking about crabs. She loved crabs.

**01:26:14**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-huh, she loved crabs. You know who loved crabs, too? Cicely Tyson loved crabs. And when Motley would come in here—well, she was Constance Baker then. When she was trying to get James Meredith in, and before they would go to court they would come here and I would get up and come here and fix them breakfast.

**01:26:35**

**John Pope:** What did James Meredith like?

**01:26:38**

**Leah Chase:** He was quiet and not saying much. Constance would be doing it all.

**01:26:42**

**John Pope:** Well yeah. She was a whole lot of woman.

**01:26:44**

**Leah Chase:** She was a whole lot of woman is right.

**01:26:47**

**Sara Roahen:** Did you know how phenomenal it was that you were serving all these people at the time?

01:26:51

**Leah Chase:** No. No, people ask me that. “Well Leah, where’s your pictures?” Pictures? I didn’t have no camera. I didn’t have cameras. I’m just doing what I got to do. You just do what you have to do. [*Emphasis Added*] You know you just do it. I’m not a big comedian fan but one day I had the television on and Chris Rock was on. And [*Laughs*] I thought that was the funniest thing I ever heard in my life. One man was saying something about he did this and he did that and he didn’t get an award or something; he didn’t get something. So Chris Rock said, “Man, what you talking about? You don’t get awards. That’s what you’re supposed to do.” [*Laughs*] You’re supposed to—. Well that’s what I was supposed to do and I just did it. [*Laughs*]

01:27:36

**John Pope:** No, because I was wondering that myself: if there was some stash of pictures somewhere of you with—.

01:27:42

**Leah Chase:** No, I wish there were but—

01:27:43

**John Pope:** I mean there are two pictures of you with President Obama and that’s good.

01:27:47

**Leah Chase:** Uh-huh, but in those days we didn't have cameras to take pictures. And you know I didn't document anything like people documented and had pictures of the storm. I don't do that. I just move on.

**01:28:02**

**Sara Roahen:** I bet other people have pictures of themselves with her, but—

**01:28:04**

**Leah Chase:** Me, I just move.

**01:28:07**

**Sara Roahen:** Yeah, you've already—

**01:28:07**

**Leah Chase:** I just do what I have to do and I don't stop to think about it. I just do it.

**01:28:13**

**John Pope:** The art here is always—my favorite is the boys with the trumpet. How did you get interested in amassing this collection of art?

**01:28:26**

**Leah Chase:** Well you learn. When you learn and you begin to appreciate things, and I have to credit Celestine Cook. You don't know Celestine.

01:28:35

**John Pope:** Oh yeah, she was a trustee on the board [of the New Orleans Museum of Art]. She was your mentor.

01:28:38

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, she was. When it came to art, she was. And she told me, I'll never forget. Celestine sat on the board and when she had to rotate off she came in here, Sara, and she said, "Leah, I'm going to put your name up—." That's the way she used to talk. "I'm going to put your name up to take my place on the board." I said, "Celestine, don't do that. I don't know anything about art. I don't have that kind of knowledge. I get—." "You must do that. What it's going to do for your business—." The woman had vision. She had so much vision, and you know the black community did not follow her enough because they thought Celestine was just doing things to make herself big. But she always tried to uplift people and she told me that. She said, "Leah, I'm telling you what it's going to do for your business." I said, "Go ahead, Celestine. Nobody ain't going to take me on this board anyway; go ahead." So the next day she comes by: "You're on." I said, "My god, Celestine. What am I going to say? What am I—?" So you know, [I] go to the first meeting and I dressed up. I think you got to *dress up*. I put on the best thing I have: a cape and a hat, everything. I'm going to the board meeting, Sara. **[Laughs]**

01:29:59

And I went to the board meeting and learned as you go. You just sit and listen. You don't say a word; you just sit and listen. Then you learn as you go. I may not know what Dr. Levy knew. I may not know what Dr. Starr did. Did you know Dr. Starr?

**01:30:22**

**John Pope:** Fred Starr?

**01:30:23**

**Leah Chase:** Fred Starr.

**01:30:24**

**John Pope:** I danced to his music.

**01:30:26**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, Fred was so good. I did not have that knowledge. I'm sitting with men who is way above my head, but I just listened.

**01:30:35**

**Sara Roahen:** Did you already own art and collect art at that point?

**01:30:39**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-um.

**01:30:41**

**Sara Roahen:** That is kind of what spurred you?

**01:30:42**

**Leah Chase:** When I got on that, that started it. Celestine introduced me to artists and she said—like she introduced me to Bill Hudson. And, “Come to my house, Leah. I’m going to show you this and I’m going—.” I’d go to Celestine's house and she’d showed me Bill Hudson’s work. And that’s when he would take off. He would take off work maybe six months and take off and paint. He was painting off the coast of Africa when he did that series Sky, Sea, and Land or whatever. So that’s where I got my first piece.

**01:31:13**

**Sara Roahen:** That’s here?

**01:31:13**

**Leah Chase:** It’s here. It cost me about, what? Three hundred dollars. That’s it. So I don’t know nothing and Celestine is telling me what to do. She introduced me to people all the time. She is trying to tell me about this one and about Hale Woodruff, about Jake Lawrence, and about all those people. So I’m just listening to Celestine. Then when I get on this board—I learned how I got on that board. Moise Steeg was the chairman of that board. My name came up tied, would you believe, with Charlie Kohlmeyer, Herman Kohlmeyer’s brother. Now Charlie Kohlmeyer, big Jewish man, all the money in the world, knowledgeable about art—and here I’m tied with him. To break that tie the president or the chairman has to vote. Usually the president or chairman don’t vote before; he has to vote to break that tie. Moise Steeg voted for me. That took vision. I’ll never forget that man for that. I will never forget. It took guts, it took vision that we must move these black people. We must have these black people.

**01:32:32**

So I will always—and I told him that before he died, to Melba [his wife], his son. I'll never forget, and that's what he did to put me on that board.

**01:32:42**

**Sara Roahen:** And so were you the first black person on the board?

**01:32:45**

**Leah Chase:** Second.

**01:32:45**

**John Pope:** After Celestine.

**01:32:46**

**Leah Chase:** After Celestine.

**01:32:47**

**Sara Roahen:** Oh? I didn't know Celestine.

**01:32:48**

**John Pope:** What did Sylestine Cook—what made her gravitate towards you as someone—as a protégé or someone who could—?

01:32:54

**Leah Chase:** You know I used to—because she would call up here and I could cook. And Celestine would use me to cook things for her and to do things for her. And that’s how we would meet. I would cook things for her and send them over there and do different things. But Celestine was something else. I’ll never forget Eunice Johnson—**[Laughs]** on *Ebony* [*Magazine*]. Eunice was a trip and a half. And Eunice couldn’t understand Celestine either. You know Celestine was all prim and proper and all full of [Interviewer’s note: here Mrs. Chase uses a Creole word that she doesn’t know how to spell. It sounds like “vee-on,” with a French pronunciation. Its English translation, according to Mrs. Chase, is “full of baloney.”], as the Creoles call it. But she would say, “Leah, what does she do?” I said, **[Laughs]** “Miss Johnson, I don’t know. The woman just moves.” “Oh.” Because Eunice Johnson had all the money in the world. But you know she was Eunice Johnson, that’s it. Take or leave it, here I am. **[Laughs]**

01:33:47

**John Pope:** When did Celestine Cook die? I wish I had known her.

01:33:49

**Leah Chase:** Celestine died in 1984/’85. She died, because I remember we had to wheel her in here out of the hospital in a wheelchair to see the day we opened because she couldn’t come out. She was in the hospital and we had—she wanted to see this place before it opened. And so we wheeled her in here to see the place before it opened.

01:34:21

**Sara Roahen:** What year were you put on the board?

**01:34:24**

**Leah Chase:** Nineteen seventy—when was it? '75, '74—'75, about that time.

**01:34:31**

**Sara Roahen:** And were your in-laws around then?

**01:34:34**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah. They didn't understand where I was coming from. They thought I was crazy as a bat, too. *[Laughs]*

**01:34:39**

**John Pope:** Sharon Litwin told me this wonderful story that you for your seventy-fifth birthday you had a party at the museum that was a fundraiser and you charged your family.

**01:34:48**

**Leah Chase:** I sure did. *[Laughs]*

**01:34:52**

**John Pope:** You have no shame. *[Laughs]*

**01:34:54**

**Leah Chase:** You're coming to the party, you're paying. I got a problem if you're not paying now if you come. Don't come now if you don't pay.

**01:35:00**

**John Pope:** I just found out about it yesterday. I've been out of town, so—

**01:35:04**

**Leah Chase:** Don't—

**01:35:04**

**John Pope:** We're talking. One thing that—well, the fact that this came back so strongly after Katrina, I know it took a lot of work—

**01:35:16**

**Leah Chase:** A lot of help from a lot of people.

**01:35:18**

**John Pope:** A lot of tears and a lot of fundraisers. But did you ever doubt that it would come back?

**01:35:25**

**Leah Chase:** No. I never doubted. I just *do*. You got to understand how I work. I just do from day to day. I don't think about how I'm going to do it. I don't think about where it's going to

take me. I never—which might be a bad thing to say: I never think about a dollar. That never crosses my mind, if I'm going to make this dollar today. I don't know. I know if I do what I'm supposed to do everything will come my way.

**01:36:02**

**Sara Roahen:** Someone must think about the dollar.

**01:36:03**

**Leah Chase:** My husband. [*Laughs*]

**01:36:04**

**Sara Roahen:** [*Laughs*] That's his role?

**01:36:07**

**Leah Chase:** My husband, that's his thing. [*Laughs*]

**01:36:09**

**Sara Roahen:** How did the—so the art—. This restaurant flooded, but you've come back since Katrina and the art is still here. How did that happen?

**01:36:18**

**Leah Chase:** Well I had a grandson that was a fireman at the time.

01:36:24

**John Pope:** The frat boy?

01:36:24

**Leah Chase:** No, not the fat one—

01:36:25

**John Pope:** No, frat boy?

01:36:27

**Leah Chase:** Oh no, not frat boy. David. David was one of Emily's children. David was the top of the line of group two—what we call group two for Emily. Emily had J.B., Victor, Chase, and Tracy. And that was all she had. And then I forget how many years—two, three years, maybe four years, before she had another baby. And we always refer to them as “group two.” And group two belongs to we call a “six-pack,” because I have six that are around the same age. Six grandchildren. And don't interfere with the six-pack. They don't like that at all. They are the six-pack, and that's what they will say.

01:37:20

But you know you just go, Sara, from day to day and do what have you to do.

01:37:26

**Sara Roahen:** But David came in and took—?

01:37:28

**Leah Chase:** David—

01:37:28

**Sara Roahen:** What did he do?

01:37:29

**Leah Chase:** —yeah, David came in and he said—I said, “David, I’m coming. I want to come back. I’m coming back to see.” He said, “Grandmother, I’m telling you, you can’t come back.” I said, “David, we never had water in that restaurant before. I know we don’t have it now.” He said, “Grandmother, I’m telling you, you can’t come in.” And David is a boy—he doesn’t say very much; he doesn’t talk about a lot of things. So one day he called me and said, “Grandmother.” He used to come in here every day. And he said, “The water is not to the art but if I don’t move it off the mold is going to get it.” So by that time the firemen from New York and all had come to help us—God knows they were appreciated. So one evening when he got off he said, “Grandmother, they’re going to help me, and I got a truck and I’m going to take it all and we’re going to bring it to Baton Rouge.”

01:38:26

So that’s how we saved it. David came in here—first time in all our lives they had—nobody had ever attempted to get in this restaurant. Never. As bad as the [housing] project people were, nobody ever attempted that until Katrina. I guess the people were out of their minds. They were out of their minds. They didn’t know whether they were going to live or die,

water all around them, not going anywhere. They broke in this restaurant. They didn't touch a bit of the art. They took all the liquor. *[Laughs]*

**01:38:59**

**John Pope:** Well yeah.

**01:39:00**

**Sara Roahen:** That's what was going to get them through another day I guess.

**01:39:04**

**Leah Chase:** I guess so, but then so he moved the art and I didn't lose a piece.

**01:39:08**

**John Pope:** You got every—I remember, I cried a lot about this place. Coming back in and seeing the glass—

**01:39:19**

**Leah Chase:** Now the glass, I just knew. I said, "Well I know I lost the glass but that's it."  
Glass still standing.

**01:39:26**

**Sara Roahen:** Tell me what you—for the record, what you mean by the glass.

**01:39:29**

**Leah Chase:** The stained glass out there, the stained glass windows. I said, “I know they’re gone. They must be broken. Something must have happened.” It didn’t. Wasn’t that luck? It didn’t. Then I came back in here and people started calling me from all over. I stayed in Baton Rouge, and I worked with John Folse a lot in Baton Rouge. Good man. Oh, that man helped me. We went to Chatawa [Mississippi] and we did something for the people out there. There’s a group of nuns that lived in Chatawa and we went out there to—. They had taken in people from Chalmette. Now they didn’t get water in Chatawa but they were locked off because the wind had blown all the trees across the road and the poor nuns were trapped. So they had taken in some refugees—“refugees,” I call them, or people from Chalmette. And those people stayed with the nuns and worked and cleared the roads and everything.

**01:40:34**

So one day John said, “Leah, I’m going to pick you up and we’re going to Chatawa to cook for the people.” So we went, John and I, to cook for the people in Chatawa. Lovely, lovely nuns.

**01:40:47**

**John Pope:** Now what—there was the Holy Thursday Lunch at—

**01:40:58**

**Leah Chase:** Muriel’s.

**01:40:57**

**John Pope:** Muriel's, yes. And then you were back in here, inside, in 2008, as I recall?

**01:41:04**

**Sara Roahen:** Open you mean? It opened then?

**01:41:07**

**John Pope:** Yeah, there was an outdoor in 2007.

**01:41:11**

**Leah Chase:** That was so funny. Sara, we're coming in here; everybody is coming from all over. The little uptown ladies, they're coming. Like, what's her name? Bev Church. All that little group, Honey, they cleaned and all. The only chairs I saved were the ones in the Victorian Room. The ones that I told you I liked from day one. And they were there and they were cleaning off the chairs and they were doing all that.

**01:41:37**

Chuck Dunn from Viking brought a group in here. You know Chuck?

**01:41:42**

**John Pope:** I met him at Muriel's when he—. I mean you had been wanting an oven for, what? Forty years. And he gave you one.

**01:41:51**

**Leah Chase:** Chuck Dunn didn't give me that. Mr. [Nestor] Ibrahim gave me that from Southbend.

**01:41:56**

**John Pope:** Oh, Southbend?

**01:41:57**

**Leah Chase:** Southbend. That was another nice man. He gave me that stove. He said, "I'm going to give you a brand new stove just like you had." So he gave me that ten-burner stove. But Chuck Dunn brought all the big people from Viking in here. They came in here with all the cleaning supplies, the mops, the brooms, the everything, Sara, and they got this place to where I could see my way through. They got everything boxed up, cleaned up; the things that were high, put them in boxes and labeled them. That was Chuck Dunn. He cleaned this out so when I would come in I could see my way clear.

**01:42:38**

**John Pope:** You always talked about not being able to pay these people back. It was payback time for you.

**01:42:46**

**Leah Chase:** I don't feel that way. But you know they did, they did. You know, I just did things for people. I would go all around and when I think about it, everywhere I went in this country was to fundraise for somebody. [*Laughs*] I went to Fort Wayne, Indiana. I used to go to Fort

Wayne every year. I would go to Fort Wayne, Indiana because I met this woman named Margaret Miller. She came down here when her husband was living. Margaret Miller was a food person. Like she would take tours on ships and all that and cook and show them how to cook and all that. And her husband had a cemetery; they owned this cemetery in Fort Wayne.

**01:43:28**

But I'll never forget Bud. She loved Bud so much and she always talks about Bud. I first met her, she came to dinner here with a group of people upstairs. That's when I met Margaret Miller. So then they sent people down here—and we had already had Chefs Charity; they sent somebody down here to look at that program and they would copy that program and bring it to Fort Wayne. So that's how I got to Fort Wayne.

**01:43:58**

**John Pope:** It's just one of these destinations I never would associate you with.

**01:44:01**

**Leah Chase:** I loved it in Fort Wayne.

**01:44:02**

**Sara Roahen:** And—

**01:44:03**

**Leah Chase:** The best people in the world, and still I know these people. Pete Eshelman, I think I inspired him to open a restaurant in Fort Wayne. He's got a nice old restaurant called Joseph

Decuis in Roanoke, Indiana right out of Fort Wayne. But I met these people and they were so good to me. They would have things for me when I'd go to Fort Wayne. They would really do things. I would bring everything I had to bring. I would bring gumbo—stuff to make gumbo and all that. I would bring that food up there. I must have been crazy, Sara, and go on a plane by myself, John.

**01:44:40**

**John Pope:** Well it's what you do. You said it's what you do.

**01:44:42**

**Sara Roahen:** Yeah.

**01:44:43**

**Leah Chase:** And I would just go and I would raise this money for these people and we would have this big show and this big dinner. And every year I would—the same people who have—Vera Bradley—I went to help them raise for their cancer people.

**01:45:03**

**Sara Roahen:** And that's why everybody came to your aid after Katrina.

**01:45:05**

**Leah Chase:** After Katrina, Fort Wayne brought me all those chairs out there.

01:45:09

**Sara Roahen:** They did?

01:45:11

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm.

01:45:11

**John Pope:** It's sort of like a movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," when everyone showed up to bail out Jimmy Stewart.

01:45:16

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, they did. Now you see I didn't know Doug Ahler. Do you know Doug Ahler?

01:45:21

**John Pope:** Uh-um.

01:45:22

**Leah Chase:** Doug Ahler is what I call the moneyman behind Muriel's. He's a partner with Mr.—oh, what's the man over there? Yes, I do. I can't remember his name. And the man who runs it, he's a partner. Doug is a silent partner I guess. So somebody asked Doug could they have a fundraiser? And he said, "I don't operate it; I own it. I own part of it, but I don't have things—." So they went to this man and he said, "Yes." We can have it. So we went in there. John Fols

came in there with everything. He came in there and helped me and we—. Then the people in the community came and gave that and we did that.

**01:46:08**

**Sara Roahen:** Did you raise a lot of money that day? I was there that day.

**01:46:11**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, they did. They raised about \$30,000.

**01:46:15**

**John Pope:** Plus the—

**01:46:16**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, plus the stove. And then now before we opened up here comes the Holy Thursday again. So John says, “Leah, we’re going to have Holy Thursday and we’re going to give it away.” So when we had Holy Thursday here John brought all the help, all the food, all the everything, and all we asked the people was to put a tip in the bucket for the waiters. He brought the waitstaff. He brought everything, you hear me.

**01:46:48**

**Sara Roahen:** Miss Leah, I have to ask you—. Number one, because I’m feeling conscious about the time—I know we need to wrap this up soon—but also because I wanted to ask you

about gumbo. And the Holy Thursday story is a good place to start. We keep referring to that, but could you tell us for the record what you're referring to when you say "Holy Thursday?"

**01:47:07**

**Leah Chase:** Well that's gumbo z'herbes day. And I learned from—what's Soniat's name, do you remember?

**01:47:15**

**John Pope:** Leon Soniat.

**01:47:15**

**Leah Chase:** Leon Soniat. That wasn't only in the black community. That was also in the so-called "Creole white" community. Because Leon was another man that was good to me. He let me help him. He had a show called "Jambalaya" at the library. I'll never forget and Leon used to get me into help him. And everywhere Leon did a demonstration he would send the people here, would you believe? He would.

**01:47:42**

**John Pope:** He was involved on the Jefferson School Board.

**01:47:46**

**Leah Chase:** Really?

01:47:46

**John Pope:** Oh yeah. We knew him for years.

01:47:48

**Leah Chase:** Wonderful man, wonderful man. And Leon would send all the people and say, “You got to go there to eat.”

01:47:55

**Sara Roahen:** So his family had a gumbo z’herbes tradition as well?

01:47:58

**Leah Chase:** Yeah. Everybody in the Creole community. That was your—see, this city was so Catholic. Everybody was Catholic. That was your last meat day before Easter Sunday, so on Holy Thursday you got to eat green. I don’t know if that came by way of the islands, because down in the islands they have something called callaloo that is something like a gumbo z’herbes but it has okra in it. And they would make these greens, and you know the Creoles of color were supposed to be very superstitious. So you could not have uneven numbers. You have to have even numbers. And it was done on Holy Thursday because Last Supper, that’s like a big thing, like the Jewish Passover. You know, a Jewish Seder meal, that was what you did on Holy Thursday.

01:48:53

But all they served you was gumbo z’herbes, and in that gumbo z’herbes they had just loads of meat. Creoles of color believe in meat. They had veal stew, and it had to be a brisket

stew with the little bone. They were picky about things. They had ham in it. They had sausage in it, and they had chicken in it. And all you had for your dinner on that day was a big bowl of gumbo z'herbes. And I added the fried chicken to it, but that's all you would eat was that big bowl of gumbo z'herbes with all that meat.

**01:49:25**

Now the uneven numbers was because they always believed even numbers were bad luck. Uneven numbers are good luck. And they also believed that every time you ate that gumbo you would acquire a new friend for every green they had in the pot. Oh, you're going to have new friends. You're going to have good friends if you eat these seven greens or these nine greens or whatever. And that's how you have gumbo z'herbes. It just—I started doing what all the Creoles did.

**01:50:00**

**Sara Roahen:** When did you start serving that at this restaurant? When did you start your Holy Thursday tradition?

**01:50:05**

**Leah Chase:** How many years before the storm?

**01:50:08**

**John Pope:** I've been coming here for a bunch of years.

**01:50:10**

**Leah Chase:** A bunch of years before the storm. [*Laughs*]

**01:50:13**

**Sara Roahen:** Okay, but not since the beginning? I mean it was maybe twenty years or fifteen years?

**01:50:17**

**Leah Chase:** See, Sara, you got to understand: not only in the Creoles of color, but black people, they did not realize their worth.

**01:50:29**

**John Pope:** What?

**01:50:30**

**Leah Chase:** I don't think they realized their worth because they never put emphasis on anything they had. They never thought it was good enough. They never thought it was something to make of it. It was just what we do. Like the ladies who sew; the men who do the carpenter work. Just what we do, you know. They didn't put any value on themselves or on their work.

**01:51:02**

**John Pope:** Was this because of the—this is the way they had been made to feel as second-class citizens?

**01:51:06**

**Leah Chase:** I think so. I just think this is the way they were made to feel.

**01:51:10**

**Sara Roahen:** So it didn't—

**01:51:11**

**John Pope:** I'm just thinking maybe—I was just trying—

**01:51:13**

**Leah Chase:** Because they did not put any value on what they had or what they did, particularly their food. They didn't.

**01:51:25**

**Sara Roahen:** So are you saying that you didn't—it didn't occur to you until quite late that gumbo z'herbes might be something that everybody would like?

**01:51:31**

**Leah Chase:** No, you just do it. You just do what you do.

**01:51:36**

**John Pope:** What, four seatings this year?

**01:51:39**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, we did 600-some people.

**01:51:42**

**Sara Roahen:** And can you tell me about what kinds of greens might go in there, or what kind you put in the gumbo z'herbes this year?

**01:51:49**

**Leah Chase:** This year—you put in any number of greens. We put in kale. We put in mustard greens. We put in beet tops. Beet tops are very important to them. Carrot tops, cabbage, collard greens, everything. And one thing that Creoles used to do—and Leon knew that very well—you would see them in the neutral ground. They may have paintings or pictures of people, little old ladies in the neutral ground, and they'd go with a brown bag and a knife. And that's when they had to make wider neutral grounds than they have now. They would dig in peppergrass. Now peppergrass is the grass that grows like this, [*Gestures*] flat to the ground, and it kind of is like a lemony grass and that's what they would put—that was important to put in those gumbo z'herbes, is that peppergrass, because it would give you another little flavor, little twang to that. And those Creoles would be in there digging that peppergrass, and I used to use the peppergrass until I couldn't find it anymore. There's no digging up the neutral ground anymore. But I found it this year, and I bet you a man is going to sell it to me next year. I went to a strawberry farm in Ponchatoula.

**01:53:01**

**John Pope:** Really?

**01:53:02**

**Leah Chase:** He got it. I said, “God, look at the peppergrass. What you going to—?” He said, “What are you talking about?” “Peppergrass. There it is right there.” *[Laughs]* He didn’t know he had it all over his place.

**01:53:13**

**Sara Roahen:** Did you put it in your gumbo this year?

**01:53:16**

**Leah Chase:** I didn’t have it this year because that was after that. I put watercress in it to give it—.

**01:53:22**

**Sara Roahen:** Is that kind of a little similar?

**01:53:23**

**Leah Chase:** It’s not as powerful as peppergrass and it don’t give it the right flavor like peppergrass, but it’ll add something to it. But that peppergrass was a must. So next year I’m going to get my peppergrass from him. *[Laughs]*

**01:53:35**

**John Pope:** You were using kale before anybody else was. That's a tough vegetable to deal with.

**01:53:43**

**Leah Chase:** It is but I would just grind it up and boil it and put it in there and grind it up with the rest of the greens.

**01:53:49**

**Sara Roahen:** Why are—

**01:53:51**

**John Pope:** I was just saying you were doing hands-on work with all this in the kitchen.

**01:53:54**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, all this in the kitchen and not knowing what the heck I'm doing. I'm just doing; I'm just doing stuff. [*Laughs*] You see, John, at first you couldn't go in any big white restaurant and find gumbo. They didn't have that.

**01:54:09**

**John Pope:** Excuse me.

**01:54:10**

**Leah Chase:** No, they didn't.

**01:54:11**

**John Pope:** But it's a local specialty.

**01:54:14**

**Leah Chase:** But they didn't have it. They would serve you the Creole—you know, like cream sauces, and like bisque, and like things like that. But jambalaya and—they didn't have that. They didn't serve that.

**01:54:28**

**Sara Roahen:** Not at The Colonial?

**01:54:30**

**Leah Chase:** No way in the world.

**01:54:32**

**John Pope:** Did Paul Prudhomme turn that around? What turned things around?

**01:54:36**

**Leah Chase:** Well as far as the food, the recognition of our food, I have to give that credit to Paul because he got on the road with his blackened redfish and made people aware of what we're serving in New Orleans. But as I said, we were just serving it. We didn't make any big emphasis on what we were doing, particularly in this restaurant. I just served it. Jambalaya, that's what you

knew. But it wasn't a big thing then. And no, I don't remember serving jambalaya at The Colonial Restaurant. You had roast beef. You had mashed potatoes. You had things like that.

**01:55:17**

**John Pope:** That's dull.

**01:55:19**

**Leah Chase:** But you had shrimp Newburg and lobster and things like that, but you sure didn't have gumbo and jambalaya.

**01:55:27**

**Sara Roahen:** So when you started here at Dooky Chase's, only black restaurants would be serving gumbo?

**01:55:36**

**Leah Chase:** And all-black restaurants wouldn't serve that too, either. No, because they knew that's what you were going to get at your home. They would serve you fried chicken, fried shrimp, things like that. Or a roast beef po-boy. Things like that.

**01:55:54**

**Sara Roahen:** Oh, I was going to ask more about gumbo.

**01:55:58**

**John Pope:** Now that’s the thing, but part of what I talked about earlier, a restaurateur should sort of bring people along and say, “Well, yes, you can get this home but look at what we can do to make it more special and make it worth coming out for.” Like the gumbo z’herbes.

**01:56:16**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, well I don’t know how I—I just did that. I just said, “I’m going to serve gumbo z’herbes and I don’t know if the black people are going to take it or leave it. I’m just serving it. This is what I serve. You know another bad thing we have in the black community in most of our businesses? We do not understand the value of marketing. We don’t understand the value of marketing. Marketing is so important. So we didn’t even advertise what we had like we do today. We didn’t even advertise or say, “Come, and this is what we have,” because we were not extremely proud of what we did. We just did it.

**01:57:03**

**John Pope:** That’s good.

**01:57:05**

**Leah Chase:** It is good.

**01:57:04**

**John Pope:** People need to know about it. [*Laughs*]

**01:57:08**

**Leah Chase:** They do and it's good. So you see we learned a lot as we go along, Sara. We learn to appreciate food. We're learning to appreciate one another. That is the best thing that I have seen since day one: that what's happening in this city today, and what's happening I guess in the country today, we have learned to appreciate one another.

**01:57:37**

**John Pope:** Well a lot of that is post-Katrina.

**01:57:38**

**Leah Chase:** Yes. Yes, we have learned to appreciate other people, what they do, how they do it, and that is a good thing. And I think the whole world began to look at us totally different. Now people may not agree with Mr. Obama on a lot of things he does. Maybe some of them are wrong, some of them are mistakes. But I think the world as a whole looks at this country now differently because before they used to say in their minds, "Look what you do to the black man. You ignore him." Now they can't say that. They can't say that. So they look at us totally different that we're coming around. We're learning to live with one another. We're learning to appreciate one another. We're learning to put the value where it belongs and don't care what color you are. And I tell that to black children, especially black men. And we have to put that more on them now, Sara. It's your blackness can get you in a door maybe where it won't get somebody else in the door because if you're black as tar, you dress nice, you look nice, they're going to look at you twice and say, "Oh, I don't believe this. Let me try him out." That's just human nature. Let me try him out.

**01:59:16**

So that blackness will get you in the door if you use it right.

**01:59:21**

**Sara Roahen:** You fed President Obama?

**01:59:23**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm.

**01:59:25**

**Sara Roahen:** Can you tell us about that?

**01:59:25**

**Leah Chase:** Poor President Obama. The first time we fell off because he put hot stuff in my gumbo, and I think everybody in the world knows that now. “Mrs. Chase, you told him off.” I’m sorry. And you know it’s too funny. Especially the locals, when they think you got something. “You told him, Mrs. Chase. You told him off. ‘Don’t put no—.’”

**01:59:47**

**Sara Roahen:** You told him not to put hot sauce in the gumbo?

**01:59:49**

**Leah Chase:** I said, “Mr. Obama, that’s one thing you don’t do is put hot stuff in my gumbo.”

**[Laughs]** You just don’t do that. But from Chicago, what do you know about gumbo? Nothing, but—

**01:59:59**

**Sara Roahen:** Did he laugh?

**02:00:00**

**Leah Chase:** He laughed, and the next time I served him with that z’herbes he said, “Are you still mad at me?” I said, “No, I don’t think I’m mad at you.” But the last time he came to the city they sent for the gumbo and the chicken. So I sent hot stuff. So I said, “Put the hot stuff if you want. Go ahead.” But it’s just fun seeing what people do.

**02:00:21**

**Sara Roahen:** How many Presidents have you cooked for?

**02:00:25**

**Leah Chase:** I cooked for two here, and one I helped serve in Atlanta—that’s Mr. Clinton. I have a picture—I need to get it made bigger—of Mr. Clinton and I, for one reason. Mr. Clinton, at that time I took that picture, did not know me from Adam. But if you would see that picture you’d think he’d known me for 100 years.

**02:00:49**

**John Pope:** That's a politician.

**02:00:49**

**Leah Chase:** That's a politician, and that's the kind of charisma he had. You would think the man knew me for 1,000 years.

**02:00:57**

**John Pope:** He's a rock star.

**02:00:56**

**Sara Roahen:** Yeah, that's what he does. And so you served President Clinton, and then who was the third?

**02:01:02**

**Leah Chase:** President Bush, G.W. He was a sweetheart of a man. Maybe not a good President, because he did not have good people around him. He did not have people with vision like—Mr. Cheney was too old. He didn't have vision. And Mr. Bush was not a good listener. But a nice man he was. And that's something, the news media came to me: "Why did he eat here twice? He didn't eat anywhere else twice." I said, "I don't know." But every time he came to New Orleans he would send for me.

**02:01:41**

**Sara Roahen:** What did he want to eat? He's famously not such a good eater.

02:01:46

**Leah Chase:** No, but he ate. And look, the first time he came was with Karl Rove and all his staff. I fed him and we had thirty people right out there in that dining room. And I didn't know when they asked me to do that—Colonel—what's his name?

02:02:06

**John Pope:** I want to say Honoré but—

02:02:07

**Leah Chase:** Honoré brought him here, Colonel Honoré brought him here. “The Colonel will be bringing—the President wants to eat with you.” Okay, so I don't know what the heck to do. I don't know what—I don't have anything going for me. I wasn't opened. I wasn't this. I called John and I said, “John, you have to come help me.”

02:02:30

**John Pope:** That would be False?

02:02:32

**Leah Chase:** False. I said, “You have to help me because I don't know what I'm doing.” So John said, “Don't worry about it, Leah. Don't do anything. You just get the food. I'm coming. I'm coming with the help, I'm coming with the silver, the tablecloth, everything.” Would you believe that? John came—everything. He came and he helped and those people helped me get that food out. And every time he'd come, “Mrs. Chase, he ate everything. He ate everything you

sent out there.” I had stuffed chicken breast. I had veal panné. All that, and [they] said he ate everything. Okay, so I feed Mr. President and we go on, and then he came here and he was going to Commander’s Palace. So they called me up. “We got a President wants you to come to dinner with him at the Commander’s Palace.” Okay, so I go there, and then I’m getting there and then I go in the door to wait and the lady says, “Look where you’re sitting. Right next to him.” Well I said. “I don’t know how I got there; I guess I got there.”

02:03:36

So we had dinner there at Commander’s Palace, and then again—

02:03:40

**Sara Roahen:** Right next to him? You sat right next to him at dinner?

02:03:42

**Leah Chase:** Right next to him, and then they had a program, right next to him at the program we sat. Then at that dinner he said, “You want to fix breakfast for me?” [*Laughs*] No, I don’t really want to do that, but how do you turn the President down? “Okay, Mr. President.” So I get the breakfast ready. Eight o’clock in the morning and I’m in here and he comes. He has the President of Mexico and the Prime Minister of Canada. Their picture is right up there.

02:04:14

**John Pope:** The North American Leaders Conference.

02:04:14

**Leah Chase:** Hmm?

**02:04:15**

**John Pope:** The North American Leaders Conference.

**02:04:17**

**Leah Chase:** Is that what that was for? And that's where I fixed him the grits and quail and the catfish and the shrimp—breakfast shrimp—and all that. He said, “I never had grits and quail before but I like it.” [*Laughs*]

**02:04:31**

**Sara Roahen:** You expanded his palate.

**02:04:33**

**Leah Chase:** I expanded it. But he was so kind to me. The man was really the kindest man to me.

**02:04:40**

**John Pope:** How do you—quail—. I was cutting around bone. How do you—?

**02:04:46**

**Leah Chase:** Well, you buy it now and it's semi-boneless. You can buy with the rib bones out. And you just have to have this leg bone to deal with.

**02:04:55**

**John Pope:** Like a biology lesson.

**02:04:57**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, yeah.

**02:04:57**

**John Pope:** Hacking away.

**02:04:59**

**Leah Chase:** You don't—I get it semi-boneless. The rib cage is out and it's just a leg bone in it and you just sauté that and add in butter and put that plum jelly on it. It's the best thing in the world.

**02:05:13**

**Sara Roahen:** Miss Leah, we are way over time. John I need to get out of here.

**02:05:17**

**John Pope:** We're only forty-five—

**02:05:18**

**Sara Roahen:** You're having a private party. But I do—I just have to ask you a little bit more about gumbo because we're partially doing this for the Southern Gumbo Trail. Now, when you first put gumbo on the menu here at Dooky Chase's, was it the Creole gumbo that we eat here now?

**02:05:38**

**Leah Chase:** That's what you eat here now. That's the way every Creole of color makes gumbo.

**02:05:46**

**Sara Roahen:** Now, do you mean Creole of color both across the lake where you grew up in the country and here? Is it the same?

**02:05:53**

**Leah Chase:** And here is the same. Now, in the country they didn't make as much gumbo as they make here. They would wait for the season and make okra gumbo.

**02:06:04**

**John Pope:** I was going to say: Is this the Creole gumbo with or without a roux?

**02:06:07**

**Leah Chase:** With a roux. You make a roux.

02:06:10

**John Pope:** Okay.

02:06:10

**Leah Chase:** Now, in the country we didn't have gumbo every Sunday. And we would make more okra, and in our okra—I love it; I made it one day here and I call it “country gumbo,” because you know on Friday we just do shrimp and crabs in this okra gumbo. But in the country you put the shrimp, you put the crab, you put the stew meat, you put ham, you put chicken, sausage. All that in that okra—unbelievable.

02:06:44

Now that stew meat we put in gumbo, it has no flavor really to match the hot sausage and the sausages and the ham and all that. But the flavor it picks up is unbelievable. It'll pick up that gravy. It is that flavor and gives that meat one gorgeous taste. But that's the way all the Creoles made their gumbo, just the way I make it here.

02:07:15

**Sara Roahen:** Okay, so you mostly had—when you were living across the lake, you mostly just had okra gumbo in season?

02:07:21

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm, yeah.

02:07:21

**Sara Roahen:** But over here people ate more gumbo, if I'm understanding correctly.

**02:07:24**

**Leah Chase:** They did. They had gumbo—you had gumbo for every meal. Every festive meal particularly was started with gumbo. You would on Christmas, for instance, or Thanksgiving, you would go—when my daughter was living and she would have the dinners my job was to make the gumbo. Okay, I would send five gallons of gumbo. So that gumbo was served, and when Aunt Sadie was an old aunt and she was something: had to have that gumbo for twelve o'clock. You had to have that gumbo. You sat to the table with that big bowl of gumbo, a glass of wine, and maybe some French bread, and you ate it at 12:00. Then you got away from the table. You didn't sit to the table then. You got away from the table and you talked and laughed and had a few drinks. Two o'clock you come back to the table. That's where you had the turkey and the roast, a pork, the ham, and so many different things, all kinds of vegetables. And not greens. Creoles didn't eat greens on festive days. No way, uh-um.

**02:08:39**

**John Pope:** Why?

**02:08:39**

**Leah Chase:** I don't know why. Because that's what they ate every day. You had what they called the petit pois. Oh my goodness, you had to have those petit pois. You had oyster patties—you know that's the oyster in the patty shell. All of that. You'd have potato salad. You would

have baked macaroni, but you wouldn't have any greens for heaven's sakes. Creoles didn't eat greens on holidays.

**02:09:02**

**Sara Roahen:** Where did Aunt Sadie live? Here or—?

**02:09:04**

**Leah Chase:** Aunt Sadie lived here, uh-huh.

**02:09:07**

**Sara Roahen:** Is that who you lived with when you were going to school?

**02:09:07**

**Leah Chase:** No, uh-uh. I lived with Aunt Lucy, who was my mother's sister, and she lived to be 104, almost 105. The doctor said that she would live to be 105 and she missed it by one month. She died in May, and her 105<sup>th</sup> birthday would have been in June.

**02:09:27**

**John Pope:** Wow.

**02:09:28**

**Leah Chase:** Amazing woman. Died with all her senses and was—when she was ninety years old, she had a breast removed. I said, “Aunt Lucy, nobody would take anything off of me at

ninety years old.” She said, “That’s you.” **[Laughs]** And she went on and she had that breast removed. After that, when she was ninety-two, she gets herself on a bus and comes to Eye and Nose and Throat Hospital right up there and had a cataract removed. At ninety-two.

**02:10:04**

**John Pope:** Went by herself on a bus.

**02:10:05**

**Leah Chase:** All by herself.

**02:10:05**

**Sara Roahen:** I don’t know. I can kind of see you doing that, actually.

**02:10:09**

**Leah Chase:** Oh no. Aunt Lucy was gutsy. Aunt Lucy would just move. She would just do things, and her age didn’t—she had all her faculties at nearly 105 years old. And she didn’t look like *[makes a sound effect]*. She just kept going.

**02:10:28**

**Sara Roahen:** Can you, for the record, describe for me the Creole gumbo?

**02:10:32**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah. One thing, it's not a thick dark thing like Cajun gumbo. It is a roux but a light roux. And I make the roux with the—I rend the chaurice, which is a hot fresh sausage, in it. First you put that on and you rend that off. Now the old Creoles, don't ask them to cook in a hurry. They didn't believe in it. They would fry off those crabs; take that out of the pot. Fry off the sausages and the ham and all that; put all that on the side. Then with those juices that you left in the bottom, they would make that roux. Then they would slowly make the roux and then put all the things back. And then add the shrimp. And if you wanted oysters, they added them last because oysters turn dark and they cook too much. So that's the last thing you add: the oysters.

**02:11:26**

And you had to add that filé after. You never boiled that gumbo with that filé. It was just put in after and you stirred it up after that. And you could leave that gumbo sit there and then the next day it's the best gumbo in the world when you put it in the fridge. It's really good. It freezes very well. I still ship it all over. I ship it to Bill Cosby. Bill Cosby is so funny. He calls me up. "You going to send me some food? I'm going to Las Vegas now. Send me food for eight. With Bill Cosby, I'd send him crawfish étouffée, jambalaya. He likes what he calls dirty rice, which I call rice dressing, or whatever. And his chicken thighs, fried chicken thighs, boneless chicken thighs. That's what he's crazy about.

**02:12:21**

**Sara Roahen:** How do you prepare those?

**02:12:24**

**Leah Chase:** We just fry them and send them there. We send him bread pudding. We send him everything. And he really likes all that. We just ship it to Las Vegas when he's going to be in Las Vegas. Sometimes he will do it for eight people. Sometimes he will do it for six—whatever.

**02:12:41**

**Sara Roahen:** How do you package that and send it?

**02:12:43**

**John Pope:** I was wondering it that myself.

**02:12:44**

**Leah Chase:** You freeze it. You freeze it. And then you freeze it and then you pack it in ice and you overnight it. And it'll be just like you sent it there.

**02:12:53**

**John Pope:** That's—

**02:12:55**

**Leah Chase:** And all he does is heat it up. Quincy Jones, he likes his gumbo. If Quincy—if you got a birthday and you're Quincy's friend, you know what you're getting for your birthday: Dooky Chase's gumbo.

**02:13:04**

**John Pope:** How did you meet Quincy Jones?

**02:13:08**

**Leah Chase:** He used to come here. I knew Quincy since he had a band.

**02:13:15**

**John Pope:** He had a band?

**02:13:16**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, Quincy was a musician and had a band.

**02:13:20**

**John Pope:** I just thought he was a producer.

**02:13:21**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-um, not always. He was a musician and he had these dreads on and everything. And the Beaver—who was it? The Beaver company used to produce shows here. See, and my job is—Dooky’s job was to sell the tickets to the shows. My job was to cook for the people who came, the entertainers. They would call me, and that’s how I met Quincy. I would bring the food to the auditorium, and bring it—if they wanted gumbo, and whatever the entertainers want, I would cook it and bring it there. And Beaver Productions would pay for that. They would pay for that. Then Quincy would send everybody here. Everybody. He’d say, “You got to go by Dooky’s. You got to go by Dooky’s.” So he would send me customers and then he would—. I haven’t seen Quincy here in a long time. But he’s a good man, too. He works hard.

**02:14:18**

**John Pope:** Heck of a good producer.

**02:14:19**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm.

**02:14:20**

**Sara Roahen:** We have to wrap this up. Do you have a wrap-up question that you want to ask?

**02:14:27**

**John Pope:** I'm just sitting here—

**02:14:30**

**Sara Roahen:** I know it kind of kills me, but I also imagine you're pretty tired.

**02:14:33**

**Leah Chase:** No, I'm not. I'm—you know, crazy people never get tired. [*Laughs*]

**02:14:38**

**John Pope:** Well the thing—

**02:14:39**

**Leah Chase:** Crazy people don't—that's how I know I'm crazy. I never get physically tired. I get emotionally tired.

**02:14:45**

**John Pope:** Okay, my question: How do you keep your enthusiasm for food and for life in general? You've been doing this for a long time.

**02:14:55**

**Leah Chase:** I've been doing this in the kitchen for sixty-eight years.

**02:14:57**

**John Pope:** How do you keep your enthusiasm?

**02:14:59**

**Leah Chase:** I like what I do. I love what I do. And like when people like you come, and you see it was Father Mike's brother, and then when people come to visit me, that's like going to the gas tank and getting your gas tank filled. You have energy to keep going. If I sat down in my house all the time, I would cry all day long. I would cry and I would pray all day long. That's the kind of person I am. I'm a frightened person, so when I get out—. You know I'm not frightened of physical people. I will walk the street any time of night. I would do anything. I'm not frightened of people. I'm just frightened of death and I don't want to think about it. **[Laughs]** I want to move and keep going and just keep moving.

02:15:46

**John Pope:** I can't imagine you being frightened.

02:15:50

**Leah Chase:** I'm not frightened of losing anything. I'm not frightened of not being able to do, because I figure if I pray hard enough I don't think God would take me this far and then drop me like a hot potato. *[Laughs]* I don't believe he'll do that to me.

02:16:07

**John Pope:** I don't think so.

02:16:07

**Leah Chase:** I don't think he would do that to me. I think if I just keep thanking him and keep going, I will go. But if I sit in that house I will go crazy just thinking about things. And just getting crazy. I would sit there and cry all day long.

02:16:25

**Sara Roahen:** Well every time I come to this restaurant you're here working. It just is amazing.

02:16:30

**Leah Chase:** Because work is like medicine to me. It just makes me go and it just makes me want to do things, and when I see people come, that makes me want—I get creative again and my mind keeps saying, “You can do this. You can do that.” Like I just told—. I had a jar, a little

jar of ground ginger, and I said, “What happened to my ground ginger?” So my niece says, “Well what are you going to do with it?” And I said, “In my mind, this man sent me all this salmon from Alaska. I would make a glaze with honey and put a little ginger to give it another slap. Some mustard in it, and glaze this in a little soy sauce and glaze this thing.” So your mind is turning and you’re thinking about food all the time and that’s what Dooky [says]: “You’re always thinking about food.” Yeah, I always think about food.

**02:17:21**

**John Pope:** But and you’ve started cooking healthfully for the Heart Association. Your lighter diet.

**02:17:28**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, but I always tell people—and they say, “Leah, well you’re telling me to cook this chicken Creole—.” Like I cook chicken Creole here without any grease at all in it. You just sort of—you just spray your pan and brown off your chicken and put your tomatoes and your onions and let the chicken cook in it. That’s good. But they say, “What about the macaroni?” You cannot do anything about macaroni. So what you do is you eat the macaroni when you want to eat it. And then you don’t eat it every day. That’s the whole thing; we’ve learned to abuse things. You eat in moderation. You do everything in moderation. And that’s what has happened to us: we don’t do anything—we overdo everything. The telephones, you’re glued to your ear all day long. That was made for your convenience; not for everyday—not for all the time. You know, not to be glued to your ear all the time. So we tend to abuse things. We abuse everything, and if we don’t stop we’re going to be in trouble.

**02:18:37**

**John Pope:** I can't imagine—I know you're creative. I just don't see lobster Thermidor returning to the menu any time soon.

**02:18:41**

**Leah Chase:** No. [*Laughs*]

**02:18:43**

**Sara Roahen:** I'd like to try it.

**02:18:44**

**Leah Chase:** No, no, you won't. You won't see that returning.

**02:18:49**

**Sara Roahen:** I see people looking in here. You've got a private party coming in, so we're going to—. Miss Leah, thank you so much.

**02:18:54**

**John Pope:** You're a trooper.

**02:18:56**

**Leah Chase:** But I want that organization to stay because I want it to bring people together and not only with food.

**02:19:01**

**Sara Roahen:** The SFA?

**02:19:02**

**Leah Chase:** But bring people together; that is a good thing.

**02:19:07**

**Sara Roahen:** Well we're not going anywhere, and thank you for helping found it.

**02:19:11**

**John Pope:** It's important. Well it's—you've talked about the importance of marketing. This is it. It's what you're doing, because it's getting the word out about a good product.

**02:19:21**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, it's a good product. It's a good thing.

**02:19:24**

**John Pope:** When I was growing up it was in Metairie. They're just weren't—there wasn't the diversity of food then. This is in the early '60s. There wasn't the diversity of choices there is now. And it was—

**02:19:42**

**Leah Chase:** What I would like to work with more is those Vietnamese products. Now, unlike the Italians and the Chinese, they didn't come in our city sharing. Like the—well, the Chinese had no choice but to share, because when they brought the Chinese down here to build the great railroads, they were like slaves. Did you know that?

**02:20:11**

**John Pope:** They were slaves.

**02:20:12**

**Leah Chase:** They were. And they couldn't think these Americans want to fool with these Chinese. So they associated with the slaves. So that's how we have that Chinese food here looking like black food, [*Laughs*] because we mix with the Chinese.

**02:20:30**

**John Pope:** That's the whole thing of gumbo. It's the—

**02:20:33**

**Leah Chase:** Uh-hm, gumbo.

**02:20:33**

**John Pope:** David Grunfeld years ago did a centerfold for a restaurant edition; I think it had thirty bowls of gumbo from all over the city and they were all different.

**02:20:43**

**Leah Chase:** All different but all good.

**02:20:44**

**John Pope:** Yeah.

**02:20:45**

**Leah Chase:** All different but all good. So gumbo is, you know, they think you empty the icebox. You do not. Creoles do not empty the icebox. They're going to start with the best product they can buy. That's one thing about them: they like to eat well and they like a good product. So they will do that. It's different but it's all—I tell them gumbo is different but it's all [good].

When the Italians came in the community, all these black communities, every corner here was Italian. Mr. Schiambra on the corner; Scarmuzza and them on that corner. Lamas on that corner. All those people lived right there. So okay, the Italians come and they have something they call pasta con la sarde. It's pasta cooked with a kind of sardine sauce. So okay, we see that. We're black. You know what we do? Well we're all doing that. I'm going to take those sardines and put them in some tomato gravy, so we take the sardines and put them in some tomato gravy and put them on rice. [*Laughs*]

**02:21:49**

**John Pope:** This area is such a great laboratory if nothing else, a petri dish.

**02:21:57**

**Leah Chase:** It is.

**02:21:58**

**John Pope:** For food, because everyone borrows from everything else and you get these wonderful hybrids.

**02:22:05**

**Leah Chase:** But I'd like to do some—. The only thing I learned to work with a little bit was Vietnamese—and I like to put it in chicken soup, and that's the lemongrass. But I would like to learn about all the rest of their food.

**02:22:18**

**Sara Roahen:** Well you know what somebody told me recently, and I tried it, is that Vietnamese fish sauce—

**02:22:25**

**Leah Chase:** The pho?

**02:22:25**

**Sara Roahen:** No, fish sauce, the ingredient that they use, is good in gumbo. And I put a couple tablespoons in. It's very salty. I think it's maybe similar to putting like a dried shrimp in a gumbo or something like that.

02:22:40

**Leah Chase:** No, dried shrimp would *add* to your gumbo. Oh, dried shrimp would add to your gumbo.

02:22:45

**Sara Roahen:** So does this. It's very good.

02:22:49

**Leah Chase:** I don't know. Don't mess with the gumbo. [*Laughs*] Uh-um.

02:22:53

**Sara Roahen:** I'm going to end it there. I like that.

02:22:54

**Leah Chase:** Don't mess with the gumbo, Darling. [*Laughs*] That's what you don't do. You're Mr. Obama now.

02:23:01

**Sara Roahen:** All right, I'm going to end it there. Thank you, Miss Leah.

**02:23:03**

**Leah Chase:** Yeah, don't mess with the gumbo. [*Laughs*]

**02:23:05**

**[End Leah Chase Interview]**