



Wendy Gruntz
New Orleans, Louisiana

Date: July 19, 2019
Location: Pascal's Manale, New Orleans, LA
Interviewer: Justin Nystrom
Length: Fifty-three minutes
Project: Career Servers

Justin Nystrom: Today is July 19th, 2019, and my name is Justin Nystrom. I work at Loyola University New Orleans. I'm conducting an oral history for the Southern Foodways Alliance Longterm Servers Project. I am at Pascal's Manale on Louisiana—no, I'm sorry, Napoleon Avenue. Sometimes I get those mixed up. And it is July 19th, 2019, if I didn't already say that, and I am sitting here with Wendy—

[0:00:55.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Gruntz.

[0:00:57.4]

Justin Nystrom: —Gruntz, who is a server at Pascal's Manale, and we're going to sit down and do a little bit of an interview. Well, Wendy, thank you so much for doing this. It's great. I guess the first thing I wanted to do is just—how long have you been waiting tables?

[0:01:18.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Here?

[0:01:18.5]

Justin Nystrom: Anywhere.

[0:01:20.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh. Probably around thirty years, twenty-nine years.

[0:01:26.7]

Justin Nystrom: Goodness. So, a long time.

[0:01:29.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:01:30.7]

Justin Nystrom: Are you from New Orleans?

[0:01:34.1]

Wendy Gruntz: Yes.

[0:01:35.1]

Justin Nystrom: Where did you grow up?

[0:01:36.2]

Wendy Gruntz: I grew up in Algiers Point.

[0:01:37.8]

Justin Nystrom: Algiers Point. So, from the “Best Bank.” [laughter]

[0:01:40.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah.

[0:01:42.2]

Justin Nystrom: Tell me a little bit about your—I like to know my interview subjects a little bit kind of as people before we jump into the actual meat of the interview, so tell me a little bit about growing up here.

[0:01:50.5]

Wendy Gruntz: I loved it. Growing up in the Point was amazing. I always had the ferry. All I had to do was cross the ferry to get to the Quarter. Used to go to the French Market as a kid, and I went to Dominican High School.

[0:02:13.8]

Justin Nystrom: So you took the ferry in the morning to go to high school?

[0:02:17.8]

Wendy Gruntz: I did when I went to Dominican, but the first year I caught the bus, I didn't like the bus, and then after that, I caught the ferry and got to school. Cross the ferry, walked down Canal, and caught the streetcar.

[0:02:30.3]

Justin Nystrom: Wow. That had to take a while.

[0:02:32.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm. I enjoyed it, though. I enjoyed it. Mm-hmm. It's much better than catching the bus.

[0:02:40.0]

Justin Nystrom: Were either of your—was anyone in your family involved in restaurants or working in bars or anything?

[0:02:46.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Not when I was growing up, but now I have a brother who's also in the restaurant industry and has been there a long time.

[0:02:53.0]

Justin Nystrom: Is he a waiter as well?

[0:02:54.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, he works at August.

[0:02:56.0]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, okay, yeah.

[0:02:57.4]

Wendy Gruntz: And he's been there longer than I've been here.

[0:02:59.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

[0:03:01.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, not at August, but he's been waiting tables longer than I have.

[0:03:03.4]

Justin Nystrom: Is he an older brother?

[0:03:04.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Yes, five years older than me.

[0:03:06.6]

Justin Nystrom: Uh-huh. Great. So you graduated from Dominican. Did you start waiting tables while you were in school or—

[0:03:13.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, no, it was after. I was probably nineteen. I just gave my age away.

[laughs] I was probably nineteen, twenty, when I started waiting tables. And, mm-hmm, I just—I enjoyed it.

[0:03:26.3]

Justin Nystrom: Been doing it ever since?

[0:03:28.1]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:03:29.4]

Justin Nystrom: So where was the first place you ever worked?

[0:03:32.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Really? [laughs]

[0:03:32.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:03:33.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Shoney's. [laughs]

[0:03:35.1]

Justin Nystrom: No, no, you're not the first person who's told me that.

[0:03:37.2]

Wendy Gruntz: And my first job was Shoney's.

[0:03:41.3]

Justin Nystrom: Where was the Shoney's?

[0:03:43.2]

Wendy Gruntz: In Algiers on General de Gaulle, and then I actually moved to Chalmette for a while, and I worked at the one in New Orleans East. I worked there for a while, and I was a hustler. I worked with a bunch of lazy people, and they just didn't understand how I made so much money. You're in control of your own money there. You see people pull up in the parking lot, you go and you put them in your station. So I would leave out of there with, like, three times what the other people made. I even had call parties at Shoney's used to come in and ask for me.

Then I worked at Outback Steakhouse. I opened the Outback Steakhouse in Marrero, and then from there, I came here.

[0:04:29.6]

Justin Nystrom: Wow. So I want to go back to Shoney's because, you know, I mean, we don't think of—that's not a place where people stack up a big check.

[0:04:36.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:04:37.4]

Justin Nystrom: How many turns would you do in a shift then at Shoney's?

[0:04:44.3]

Wendy Gruntz: [laughs] Well, at the Shoney's, you had your station with four tables, but then the whole back of the restaurant was empty because you didn't have—the stations didn't belong to anybody. So I could fill up my station and then fill up all those tables back there. And mostly it was the buffet, so you didn't really have to do anything but bring drinks to people, so it wasn't ...

[0:05:05.0]

Justin Nystrom: How many tables did you have at the most? How many tables did you have to wait?

[0:05:08.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, I don't know. That was a long time ago, but probably twelve.

[0:05:12.7]

Justin Nystrom: Wow.

[0:05:14.2]

Wendy Gruntz: You know, like two stations in the back and, I don't know, ten, twelve.

[0:05:17.9]

Justin Nystrom: That's a lot of tables.

[0:05:19.1]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, but two people and just drinks, it wasn't a lot of work. It was lazy work, I mean compared to, you know, a real restaurant. [laughs]

[0:05:31.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah. So when you were making—you know, was this good money compared to what your other nineteen-year-old friends were making?

[0:05:38.8]

Wendy Gruntz: I mean, I was young at the time, but, yeah, I mean, it was decent money.

[0:05:43.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah. Were you living at home still or—

[0:05:46.0]

Wendy Gruntz: When I worked at the Algiers one, I did, but then when I moved to Chalmette, I wasn't.

[0:05:51.0]

Justin Nystrom: So you're working at Shoney's and what was—what was the—are there any thing—anything happen while you were working at Shoney's that kind of sticks out in your mind?

[0:06:03.2]

Wendy Gruntz: No, not really. I don't know. That was so long ago.

[0:06:13.4]

Justin Nystrom: Did you have a good relationship with your manager at the time?

[0:06:17.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, I did, mm-hmm.

[0:06:20.0]

Justin Nystrom: Because you were a valued—you hustled.

[0:06:22.2]

Wendy Gruntz: I did hustle, yeah. I mean, I was a good employee. I left there, they were opening the Outback on the West Bank, and I had moved from Chalmette, so I was driving from the West Bank to New Orleans East, and they were opening an Outback on the West Bank, so I applied.

[0:06:43.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, and that's quite a commute, because you would have to get the Crescent City connection, I guess.

[0:06:46.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, that was ridiculous.

[0:06:47.4]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow, wow.

[0:06:48.8]

Wendy Gruntz: That was money that wasn't that good, because I lived in Marrero, so I'd drive from Marrero all the way down.

[0:06:55.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And what were you—like, Shoney's is a—is that a twenty-four-hour restaurant?

[0:07:01.1]

Wendy Gruntz: No, I don't—I don't remember.

[0:07:06.6]

Justin Nystrom: What shift did you find yourself working most?

[0:07:09.5]

Wendy Gruntz: The breakfast, I think. No. I worked breakfast in Algiers, but then I worked dinner over on the East, so two different shifts.

[0:07:18.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah. Then I guess they're not super—it's not like a Waffle House or an IHOP where they're—they have a super late—

[0:07:25.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Nuh-uh, no.

[0:07:28.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So you've got the Outback Steakhouse, one of these big corporate chain restaurants. Well, I guess Shoney's is as well. But it was very different, right?

[0:07:38.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, yeah.

[0:07:39.8]

Justin Nystrom: So tell me a little bit about learning how to wait at a—

[0:07:44.1]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, Outback was ridiculous. You had to learn—like it was a study guide, it was like ten pages long, and you had to take this test, and it was pretty intense.

[0:07:55.1]

Justin Nystrom: What year was this, about?

[0:07:56.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Ninety—maybe [19]93. No. Started here in [19]95, so it was it would be [19]92 or [19]93.

[0:08:15.7]

Justin Nystrom: Okay. So you had a big—they had a—did you have a point-of-sale system at Shoney's as well or—

[0:08:21.8]

Wendy Gruntz: I think we wrote our tickets out. I think we wrote our tickets out.

[0:08:29.3]

Justin Nystrom: So this would be in the [19]80s?

[0:08:32.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, like late eighty—I graduated high school in [19]89, so it was between—it was probably [19]90 to [19]93, and then [19]93, [19]95, and then [19]95, something like that.

[0:08:57.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. So they were still writing out tickets that late at a Shoney's.

[0:09:01.2]

Wendy Gruntz: I think so. I don't remember. Yeah, because they'd bring it up to the register, and they'd ring it up at the register.

[0:09:08.5]

Justin Nystrom: Was it mostly kind of cash still then or—

[0:09:11.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, yeah, it was mostly cash. But I think if they paid with a card, they gave you cash for your tip. I think. If they paid at the register with a card, it was a cash tip. That's a long time ago. [laughs]

[0:09:25.2]

Justin Nystrom: No, no, no. So you get to Outback, and, of course, they're going to have a point-of-sale system, right?

[0:09:31.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:09:31.9]

Justin Nystrom: And would that have been a big adjustment or—

[0:09:34.5]

Wendy Gruntz: No, not really, but it was a totally different atmosphere. Like I said, the training was just ridiculous to go work at a—and I had a thing about it, you know, what I had to go through to work there, and then what I had to go through to work here, it was ridiculous what they put you through for Outback.

[0:10:01.7]

Justin Nystrom: This was also maybe the first time you were selling alcohol as well?

[0:10:04.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, mm-hmm. Yeah, you had to learn all the wine and you had to learn all kind of stuff.

[0:10:10.7]

Justin Nystrom: Now Shoney's, I'm sure, was single service, obviously. You didn't—

[0:10:15.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah.

[0:10:16.7]

Justin Nystrom: Was Outback single service as well?

[0:10:18.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm, yeah.

[0:10:18.7]

Justin Nystrom: So they hadn't gone to the team concept yet?

[0:10:22.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Nuh-uh. But that was also ridiculous at Outback, like you make your money, but then off of your sales, you had to tip out.

[0:10:37.0]

Justin Nystrom: So off of the sales rather than off of the tips.

[0:10:39.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Right. So if you had a table that left you nothing, it cost you money to wait on them.

[0:10:44.6]

Justin Nystrom: Wow.

[0:10:46.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah.

[0:10:47.1]

Justin Nystrom: Did that happen often?

[0:10:48.5]

Wendy Gruntz: It was the West Bank. It happened a good bit.

[0:10:50.8]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, my goodness. [laughs] So did you find that you were making less at Outback than you had anticipated?

[0:10:58.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, yeah. And then the side work was just ridiculous too.

[0:11:05.1]

Justin Nystrom: What were some of the things that they had you do?

[0:11:07.3]

Wendy Gruntz: There were like booze. You had to pick up the seat cushions and clean all the wood and the cushion and sweep your station. You had to fold so many napkins, it was insane. You had to fill your condiments. I don't know.

[0:11:32.3]

Justin Nystrom: Did they have you doing salad station stuff, too, or—

[0:11:37.1]

Wendy Gruntz: No, that was kitchen work. Yeah, that was kitchen people. Yeah, we didn't have to do stuff like that. We had to do—I don't know what we had to do in the kitchen. I mean, there was probably some stuff, you know, like tea and stuff like that. But I don't remember exactly what I had to do.

[0:11:55.0]

Justin Nystrom: How early before your shift did you have to get there to do this kind of stuff?

[0:11:59.4]

Wendy Gruntz: It was mostly after your shift.

[0:12:01.9]

Justin Nystrom: So to leave the restaurant clean.

[0:12:04.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah.

[0:12:04.9]

Justin Nystrom: So you were working dinners mostly at Outback?

[0:12:06.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm, yeah. They weren't open for lunch at the time.

[0:12:08.6]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow. Okay.

[0:12:10.1]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. When I worked there, they didn't open for lunch. I think they opened at 4:00 o'clock. Yeah. That lunch, Outback lunch thing, was a lot more recent.

[0:12:22.6]

Justin Nystrom: Who were some of the people—do you remember some of the people you worked with when you were there?

[0:12:26.9]

Wendy Gruntz: I mean, I have a waitress that works here now with me that worked there.

[0:12:36.1]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, yeah? So you've kept that friendship that long?

[0:12:38.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, not at the time, but she worked there either after me or toward the end of me over there, but then we came—and we had that in common, you know. The proprietor was Doug—Doug. I can't remember his last name. I mean, I remember, like, first names, but I don't really—Joey, he's the proprietor now, but he was, like, a bartender or waiter now. And I don't know. I wasn't there too long.

[0:13:17.0]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. What was management like there? I mean, was it—

[0:13:19.0]

Wendy Gruntz: They were okay. I had a manager named Kevin Stone. He was incredible. He was fun to work with. He was a good guy. Big party atmosphere, you know, everybody went out after.

[0:13:34.2]

Justin Nystrom: Where did y'all go to—where did y'all go to hang?

[0:13:36.9]

Wendy Gruntz: We went a lot out in the Quarter.

[0:13:44.2]

Justin Nystrom: So you hit the ferry or—

[0:13:45.5]

Wendy Gruntz: No, cross over on the bridge. But we, like, carpooled together and go out to the Quarter and stuff like that. It was back in the day. [laughter]

[0:13:54.9]

Justin Nystrom: I mean, this is all long before [Hurricane] Katrina and everything.

[0:13:59.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, yeah.

[0:14:00.7]

Justin Nystrom: New Orleans is a very different town.

[0:14:01.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Absolutely.

[0:14:02.2]

Justin Nystrom: What were some of the places in the Quarter? Would you hang out at other waiters' bars or—

[0:14:05.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Razoo's.

[0:14:14.8]

Justin Nystrom: So right there on Bourbon?

[0:14:17.1]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm. I have a terrible memory. [laughter]

[0:14:24.9]

Justin Nystrom: That's okay.

[0:14:25.6]

Wendy Gruntz: My memory is terrible.

[0:14:28.2]

Justin Nystrom: No, no, this is fine. This is fine. So, now, you were working at these corporate restaurants. Did they offer benefits when you're working there, like health insurance?

[0:14:37.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Yes. Shoney's, I don't know, but Outback did.

[0:14:44.2]

Justin Nystrom: Mm-hmm. Did that strike you as being a pretty good benefits at the time or—I mean, you were young, so, you know, you don't think, I guess.

[0:14:52.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, I don't really—I mean, I think so. It was pretty decent.

[0:14:57.7]

Justin Nystrom: Do you know, did any of the people there who were waiting tables think, “Oh, gosh, you know, I'd like to manage a restaurant” or—

[0:15:04.9]

Wendy Gruntz: No, but a lot of them moved up to management there. Like I said, I know one of them is a proprietor. The kitchen manager moved up to a proprietor. But then the proprietors that used to be proprietors or managers left. I think it's when you move up in that, there's something when you move up. They got some kind of—people don't like it too much. They got, like, guidelines for, like—I actually married the kitchen manager over there.

[0:15:43.3]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, okay, so you got an inside track.

[0:15:45.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Now, he was the kitchen manager when I waited tables there, but then when we met, like got together, was after Outback, and he didn't work there anymore. But then when we got back together, I talked him into going back. He went back to Outback and worked his way up to being a proprietor. So you buy in for x amount of dollars, and you're the proprietor, and after so many years, you either buy a restaurant or you don't have a proprietorship anymore. I know he's not with them anymore. He went to Texas Roadhouse.

[0:16:29.6]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, okay.

[0:16:30.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. So I think there's like when you get higher up in there, because none of the proprietors that I knew then are around.

[0:16:38.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. So it was sort of like you buy in a little bit and then if you're serious, then they want more from you.

[0:16:45.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, they make—yeah, they want you to, like, buy a restaurant or open a new—I don't know. Something strange.

[0:16:50.8]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. It sounds like a kind of like complicated thing.

[0:16:54.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. I mean, we were divorced. He bought it into, but we divorced by the time that happened, but I heard through the grapevine that—

[0:17:01.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah.

[0:17:02.4]

Wendy Gruntz: —that's why he isn't with them anymore.

[0:17:06.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah.

[0:17:07.1]

Wendy Gruntz: I know he's at Texas Roadhouse now.

[0:17:09.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. So you came here in Manale's in the [19]990s, huh?

[0:17:12.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:17:13.6]

Justin Nystrom: So you've been here now twenty—

[0:17:16.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Almost twenty-five years.

[0:17:17.5]

Justin Nystrom: Almost twenty-five years. That's amazing. Manale's has changed, even though it's sort of timeless, right?

[0:17:23.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Now, I remember everything about Manale's.

[0:17:26.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. Well, great. [laughs]

[0:17:27.0]

Wendy Gruntz: There we're on a subject I remember.

[0:17:28.2]

Justin Nystrom: Great. Well, let's get into it. So Manale's, what was the adjustment to coming here, I bet, from Outback?

[0:17:35.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, how I got here was I had a customer that I waited on at Outback, and he's the one, you know, told me to come over here, and so I came over and applied. And now he's still one of my customers here, and actually we're good friends. Him and his wife, you know, they come in all the time. We're good friends. So that's how I got the job here.

[0:17:59.0]

Justin Nystrom: This is a regulars, yeah, kind of place.

[0:18:00.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. And it was—I don't know. I mean, I was nervous at first, but now looking at it, it's a lot more laidback than Outback.

[0:18:11.5]

Justin Nystrom: Who interviewed you?

[0:18:13.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, they both—Bobby and Sandy both interviewed me, yeah. And at the time, they had another guy named Bob that worked here. He also interviewed me. So I got interviewed three times.

[0:18:26.2]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, my.

[0:18:28.1]

Wendy Gruntz: Took forever for me to get the job. And when I started here, practically somebody had to die for you to get on. Like, everybody had been here like ten-plus years, most of them twenty-plus years. They had a waitress worked here fifty-six years.

[0:18:41.1]

Justin Nystrom: Wow.

[0:18:42.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah.

[0:18:43.8]

Justin Nystrom: Wow. [laughs] Did it take a while for you to kind of get comfortable working here?

[0:18:49.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, yeah. They were really mean to me at first. [Nystrom laughs.]
Everybody was, like, older, and I was, like, this young blonde. Yeah.

[0:18:56.5]

Justin Nystrom: Like what did they do?

[0:18:57.6]

Wendy Gruntz: They just hated me. I used to leave here crying. They were mean. I swore I'd never treat anybody like that. They had this waitress here named Dawn, and I'll never forget, it was the year—so the Super Bowl was coming like the following year or something, and she was like, “Just stick it out. Wait till Super Bowl. The money's gonna be amazing. You're not even going to worry about these women anymore,” you know. And I did, and here I am still.

[0:19:26.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. So it was mostly women who were mean to you?

[0:19:28.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, it was all women waiters.

[0:19:29.6]

Justin Nystrom: All women waiters at Manale's then?

[0:19:31.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. We didn't have any men.

[0:19:32.4]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow, wow. So that was the—

[0:19:34.7]

Wendy Gruntz: The first male waiter was Trey [phonetic], which is Sandy's son. He was the first male waiter.

[0:19:41.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Wow. So when did the first male waiter start here? How long ago was that?

[0:19:58.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Maybe eighteen years ago?

[0:20:00.0]

Justin Nystrom: Okay. So, fairly recent.

[0:20:01.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. Maybe around eighteen, seventeen years ago, mm-hmm.

[0:20:01.8]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, interesting.

[0:20:08.4]

Wendy Gruntz: And he's a dentist now. He waited tables for a while.

[0:20:11.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Interesting. So what's your favorite thing to—what's your favorite and least favorite things to bring to the table here?

[0:20:24.2]

Wendy Gruntz: As far as food, my favorite dishes?

[0:20:30.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:20:31.9]

Wendy Gruntz: They have an appetizer called the Combination Pan Roast. It's like an oyster dressing. It's very, very popular, and it's good. We have great red sauce, like our Veal Parmesan. And the Shrimp Fried Diablo, a spicy pasta dish with shrimp and mushrooms, that's probably my—that's great. If you want to recommend something, that's what I recommend to somebody. At lunch they have a dish called the Oysters

Dante. It's a pasta dish with oysters. That's my favorite on the lunch menu by far.

Nothing else even comes close. It's great.

[0:21:11.8]

Justin Nystrom: I've had it a number of times. I'm a semi-regular at lunch, yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. What about Barbecue Shrimp? Because, I mean, Barbecue Shrimp, that's—

[0:21:22.2]

Wendy Gruntz: I mean, that's our specialty. Whenever people ask me, "What's your favorite thing on the menu?" I'd tell them. And then, "Well, what about the Barbecue Shrimp?"

I said, "Well, that's a given, you know. That's what you hear about. That's why you're here." [laughs]

[0:21:34.9]

Justin Nystrom: But do you find people surprised by it when it shows up?

[0:21:37.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, yeah, absolutely. People freak out.

[0:21:39.5]

Justin Nystrom: [laughs] What's the biggest freak-out you've ever had?

[0:00:00.0]

Wendy Gruntz: “Oh, you got to get that away from me. I can’t eat that,” because, you know, it has the heads on them, so people—I mean, people from up north and stuff, they’ve never seen nothing like that. They are, like, traumatized. Some people literally make you take it away, and they order something different. It’s pretty crazy.

[0:22:02.3]

Justin Nystrom: So how does tipping work here at Pascal’s Manale? Has it changed over time?

[0:22:07.7]

Wendy Gruntz: It’s been the same since I’ve been here. So you get—the tip out here is 10 percent of what you make, is what you tip out of, unlike Outback.

[0:22:23.8]

Justin Nystrom: So, the check.

[0:22:24.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:22:24.6]

Justin Nystrom: Okay.

[0:22:25.6]

Wendy Gruntz: So right off the top, whatever you make, they take 10 percent of it, the tip up.

[0:22:31.1]

Justin Nystrom: And that works out pretty well or—

[0:22:34.3]

Wendy Gruntz: A lot different than Outback, yes. [laughter]

[0:22:36.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah.

[0:22:38.1]

Wendy Gruntz: But you also don't have clientele like at the Outback.

[0:22:41.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So tell me about some of your—do you have call parties here often enough?

[0:22:50.0]

Wendy Gruntz: I have a ton of call parties, yes.

[0:22:52.3]

Justin Nystrom: Tell me about some of these.

[0:22:53.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, I don't know. I have so many call parties, like the other wait staff just like, "Oh, it looks like it'll be a Wendy kind of night." [Nystrom laughs.] And summertime is real slow for us, you know, and the other night we didn't have any reservations on for Thursday night.

[0:23:13.4]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow.

[0:23:14.3]

Wendy Gruntz: So I told the hostess, I'm like, "You need somebody to stay home, you know, I'll stay home, because you don't need all these people to come in for no reservations," you know.

So a reservation pops up, and it's my call party. She's like, "I guess you're not staying home." [laughter] But we wound up doing decent business. It was just like nothing was on the book, and then the first thing that shows up is my call party.

I mean, people love me. I remember what they—you know, they don't even need to order, you know. I remember what they get, and people are amazed I don't write orders

down, you know. And my favorite line is—I’ll be taking like a six-tops order, and they’re like, “You’re not going to write this down? Are you going to remember this?”

I’m like, “I guess you’ll find out.” [laughter]

I don’t know. I love it here, I do. The clientele’s awesome, and I have a little group of guys that come in every Friday lunch, you know. They’re lost if I’m not here, you know. I know what they all want. They change up, but I pretty much know what they’re going to get, you know.

And I had this one table, they came in one night with, like, some friends of theirs, and I tell the special. She’s like, “Can you get the drum another kind of way?”

And the other girl go, “Wendy’s taking care of you. You can get it however you want.”

[laughter] Not a good reputation, but, yeah, the kitchen, me and this other guy, Lou, we have a bunch of call parties. He’s been here almost twenty years.

[0:24:51.7]

Justin Nystrom: Louis Congemi. I know Louis.

[0:24:54.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. And he’s the same way. We always get special orders for the kitchen. They just hate it. [laughter] It’s not that complicated, it’s just—you know. But we always have special orders for the kitchen, and it drives them crazy. But, I mean, you treat people well, you know. That’s why they keep coming back.

[0:25:15.9]

Justin Nystrom: What's the most complicated special order you've sent to the kitchen?

[0:25:19.4]

Wendy Gruntz: I don't know. I don't know. It's not really complicated, you know. Like a lot of my customers will get the drum, but they don't the Barbecue Shrimp and the shrimp sauce on top. They're trying to be a little healthier, you know, so they'll just get like a little light lemon butter sauce with crabmeat on top, or just plain grilled drum. Drum is very popular here. People, they go crazy if they don't have the drum on a fish special, you know. But nothing really too complicated, I just—

[0:25:58.4]

Justin Nystrom: But it gets them off their routine, I guess.

[0:26:00.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, yeah.

[0:26:01.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:26:02.4]

Wendy Gruntz: It's not a menu item. [laughter] It's a Wendy or Louie menu item.

[0:26:08.8]

Justin Nystrom: So you feel like you're treated pretty well here, I guess. You've been here a long time.

[0:26:19.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:26:20.4]

Justin Nystrom: Do you know other people working at other places? Like, do you compare the way you work here to people elsewhere? You say your brother works at August.

[0:26:29.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, we don't—I'm not too, too close with my brother, so we don't really talk about like—we don't really compare that. But, I mean, only thing is I don't have benefits here, you know. Some people who are in the restaurant industry have benefits. That's the only thing I would change, is that I would have some kind of benefit. I mean, I've been here twenty-three years, but that's the only thing I regret. If I could go back in time, I would be somewhere that had benefits. But other than that, there's nothing else I would change.

[0:27:04.5]

Justin Nystrom: So what do you have in terms of health insurance? Do you have health insurance?

[0:27:11.7]

Wendy Gruntz: I have private health insurance.

[0:27:12.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah.

[0:27:13.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Nothing through here.

[0:27:14.8]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And do you feel that that's working for you or—

[0:27:19.1]

Wendy Gruntz: It's something. [laughs] Something's better than nothing. I have a daughter, so I have insurance on both of us.

[0:27:28.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Have you ever felt like—you know, this can be a physically demanding job. Have you ever felt like—have you ever had a physical injury where you've not been able to work or—

[0:27:39.1]

Wendy Gruntz: No, but I do have Aflac in case something ever did happen.

[0:27:43.8]

Justin Nystrom: You've got the duck. [laughs]

[0:27:45.1]

Wendy Gruntz: I do. I got the duck just in case.

[0:27:47.3]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:27:49.5]

Wendy Gruntz: But the bills don't stop coming. [laughs]

[0:27:51.7]

Justin Nystrom: No, no, no. The commercials are very compelling in that regard.

[0:27:57.3]

Wendy Gruntz: They offer a lot of stuff, but that's the one thing I do have is accident, you know. Something happens to me and I can't work, they pay me.

[0:28:04.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. That's through the restaurant?

[0:28:08.9]

Wendy Gruntz: What you mean?

[0:28:11.4]

Justin Nystrom: The Aflac. Do—

[0:28:12.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, there's a guy that comes out, tries to sell it. I mean, it's taken out of my paycheck. You know, they take so much out of my paycheck.

[0:28:21.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So that's smart, I guess, yes, for the restaurant...
Now, has the kitchen staff been here a long time, too, or—

[0:28:30.7] (28:08 on the recording)

Wendy Gruntz: Some of them. Now, you know, the front of the house has changed, too, since I've been here. I mean, there's some people that stuck around for a while now, but all the people like when I started, they're all, you know, gone.

[0:28:46.3]

Justin Nystrom: And they were all long-termers.

[0:28:46.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, yeah.

[0:28:47.7]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. What's turnover like now in the front?

[0:28:51.3]

Wendy Gruntz: It's not as bad as it was at one point. Now we pretty much have a pretty good staff. But for a while, it was, you know—we got the younger people now, you know. It's a lot different than when you have my age people, you know.

[0:29:06.0]

Justin Nystrom: Do you feel like they take a different approach to waiting tables?

[0:29:08.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, a little bit, mm-hmm.

[0:29:14.5]

Justin Nystrom: How would you characterize that?

[0:29:16.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Like I said, it's changing now. Some of them look at it as it could be a career, you know, but a lot of them are just like going through the stages of their life, and

this is just getting them through to the next stage. So they don't take it, you know, as serious, I guess, you know. And some people, it's just not for them, you know. You have to be able to multitask and have the personality and all that. It's not for everybody. I've seen a lot of people that it's not for them.

[0:29:47.7]

Justin Nystrom: So you're not seeing too many younger ones coming in thinking that this is something they want to do long-term or—

[0:29:53.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, we don't get the real, real young ones any—yeah, not here. We pretty much had a—we have a pretty good steady crew right now.

[0:30:04.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. So you're hoping to find people who are more interested in doing this as something they do for a living.

[0:30:08.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Right. They take it more serious, and it makes the restaurant look better.

[0:30:13.3]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you feel like your earnings have kept up with the cost of living here in New Orleans?

[0:30:22.2]

Wendy Gruntz: I do well. I do well. I can see—but it's also because I've been here so long I have my call party. I can see it not, you know, keeping up for some people. Like for me, I'm pretty—I can steadily see my income going up, you know. I don't think I've ever went from one year to the next where it went down. It's either staying steady or going up a little bit. But, I mean, I'm still \$2.13 a hour, you know. [laughs]

[0:30:56.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:30:58.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Still twenty-three years later. But I don't complain because I make good money. I wouldn't be here if I didn't.

[0:31:06.7]

Justin Nystrom: Do you own your own home or—

[0:31:08.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. I'm married. We own our own home, yeah.

[0:31:13.1]

Justin Nystrom: So rent, you know—because one of the questions of a lot of waiters is rent. It sounds like you're more settled.

[0:31:18.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah.

[0:31:20.0]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And what does your husband do?

[0:31:22.3]

Wendy Gruntz: He owns his own AC and heating company.

[0:31:24.8]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, okay. Good guy to know, you know, especially this time of year.

[0:31:28.5]

Wendy Gruntz: [laughs] He'll never run out of work.

[0:31:30.9]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, no, no, no. [laughter] That and plumbing, pretty steady here around these parts, and electricians, yeah. [laughter] Well, great.

So what's the best time of year here at the restaurant? Or best times, I guess.

[0:31:49.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Jazz Fest brings us great business, great business, but I think the busiest time of the year is like November to February.

[0:31:58.6]

Justin Nystrom: Those fall, winter days. Do you find that—how much, what percentage would you say is local and what percentage is—because I know you have—I mean, there are locals.

[0:32:07.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, we're very blessed with locals here, you know. The summertime for a *lot* of people gets really, really bad, like in the Quarter and stuff. But we have our share of locals here, which kinds of keeps us a little more better, better, more well off than the Quarter. But ours is probably, I don't know, maybe 70/30.

[0:32:30.8]

Justin Nystrom: Seventy percent local, do you think?

[0:32:33.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, maybe 60/40, something like that. No, probably 70/30. We do have our share, a lot of locals.

[0:32:39.8]

Justin Nystrom: Do you ever have people come in here, and they just don't even know what they're getting?

[0:32:43.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm. Oh, yeah. Some people walk in and look at the menu and then leave and try and make an excuse, you know, it's too pricey for them. They don't know where they—you know, they come in, they look at the menu, and they make some excuse that they got to leave, you know. And then some people, like I said, the Barbecue Shrimp just blows people away sometimes. It's pretty funny.

[0:33:06.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:33:08.2]

Wendy Gruntz: But a lot of people, you know, they come here for the Barbecue Shrimp. We have a good reputation, word of mouth. I mean, people come here from all over, “Oh, my neighbor came here, you know, up in North Carolina, said, ‘You going to New Orleans, make sure you don't forget about going to Manale's, have the Barbecue Shrimp and the Bread Pudding.’” Word gets around, especially after 113 years.

[0:33:36.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, right.

[0:33:37.4]

Wendy Gruntz: A hundred and six years.

[0:33:38.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah. Sure, sure. So how about Mardi Gras time? Because, I mean, y'all are just—

[0:33:45.1]

Wendy Gruntz: It's packed.

[0:33:45.8] [0:33:48.1]

Justin Nystrom: —really, really close to everything, right?

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, but it's terrible. We have people that want to just park in our lot. They'll come in and get a bowl of gumbo just so that they can have a parking spot to go to the parade. The parking's ridiculous. The traffic's ridiculous to get here and home. I used to love Mardi Gras until I started working here, and I can't stand it. [laughs] It's a late crowd, because they'll try and come in after the parade, you know. Parade ends late, they come rushing in here at five minutes before we close, you know, to try and get a meal. It's a nightmare. And the clientele, they come in town for a free show, you know.

[0:34:25.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:34:27.1]

Wendy Gruntz: It's not like Jazz Fest so, you know, Sugar Bowl or whatever. It's they're coming in for a free show, so you know what I'm saying?

[0:34:35.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, I do. [laughs]

[0:34:36.6]

Wendy Gruntz: They don't plan on coming here to spend a ton of money.

[0:34:39.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. They might get some of that West Bank mojo on the trip, huh?

[laughter] So Mardi Gras is bad. How about Saints games?

[0:34:48.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, we're closed on Sunday. We used to be open on Sundays, and we would get a good decent crowd. Before Katrina, we were open on Sundays, and we would get a good decent Saints crowd, you know, after the game or, if it's a late game, before the game, you know. But if it's an away game, we get a lot of tourists in here, you know, coming in town for the game. It brings business. Football season's a good time.

[0:35:15.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, Katrina. I always kind of hate asking people about their Katrina stories because, you know, every now and then they're not much, but every now and then they're really traumatic. But as waiting tables, when you wait tables, you don't make any money, so what was Katrina—how big of a destruction was Katrina for you?

[0:35:35.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, we were closed for six months, and me and Louie went and bartended together in Fat City.

[0:35:44.1]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow.

[0:35:45.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:35:46.0]

Justin Nystrom: Where at?

[0:35:46.7]

Wendy Gruntz: At Sports Beat—Sports Center. It was down the street from Drago's.

[0:35:53.4]

Justin Nystrom: Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think I know that.

[0:35:55.6]

Wendy Gruntz: I was going through a divorce from the Outback person. So I lived in Houma, because that was where his store was, in Houma. He bought the Outback in Houma, and we moved from—I lived in Houma. I commuted here three times a week to work.

Well, I had my daddy. My mama had passed away, my daddy lived with me, and so I would bring him in town to go do his stuff that he loved to do, you know. So when I brought him in, I'd come in to work. My daddy played on, like, pool leagues, and he loved to play his Bingo and see his friends. So I would drive in three times a week, work, and he would go do his thing, and then we'd ride back together. But he left his truck parked at, like, my brother's house. I would drive him all ...

So then Katrina hit, and then I started having problems in my marriage, and then I left him. And then Louie, you know, tried to talk me into bartending. I'm, like, "I'm not going bartending. I've never bartended."

He goes, "Ah, it's fun. Come on!" you know. He kept trying to talk me into it, talk me into it. He'd say, "Why don't you just come out and hang out with me at the bar tonight," because I was going through a real rough time in my life. Louie's a good guy. And so he talked me into going out that night, and I went to the bar, and he just happened to introduce me to the owners, and I happened to get a job, and then we started. [laughs]

Then we started bartending together, and we bartended together the whole time until Manale's opened back up again.

[0:37:27.7]

Justin Nystrom: I mean, that's one of the great things. Do you feel like just kind of your skill set is almost like an insurance policy that you could, if you needed to, get a job somewhere?

[0:37:37.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, but I'm also older. [laughter] I was just talking to my husband about this. I don't know. I mean, I'm almost fifty years old now, you know. People don't hire fifty-year-old waitresses. I mean. I guess, maybe. I don't know. It's a scary thought, though, after twenty-something years of being somewhere, to have to look for something else. I try not to even think about it, you know.

[0:38:00.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. Do you feel that's different because you're a woman? I interviewed another woman who, like, when she was kind of in your age and she was going—they didn't want to hire her.

[0:38:09.5]

Wendy Gruntz: See.

[0:38:10.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:38:11.5]

Wendy Gruntz: I don't know. I don't know if it's—I think because of Bob, you know, and if something was to happen, I think I could get another job, because Bob has a ton of connections and would look out for me. But it would be very strange to go somewhere else at this age. You know what I'm saying? But I love what I'm doing. I mean, I don't think I'm at an age where I can't do it anymore. It's just would they hire me, you know, like you just said.

Now here, I mean, they're hiring older people here, you know. I'm seeing a bunch of people get hired that were older than me when they came and started, you know. And definitely here I'm not like the oldest person, you know what I mean. When I started here, I mean, Miss Katherine [phonetic] waited tables till she was like seventy years old, and she would run over me. [laughs] You better get out her way, because she was not slowing down for you. She was something else. She was an amazing woman. People tease me now, like, "Oh, you're the new Miss Katherine, huh?" That's the one that been here fifty-six years. She's funny.

[0:39:28.4]

Justin Nystrom: So you're going to be here till you're seventy?

[0:39:30.0]

Wendy Gruntz: [laughs] I don't want to be. I don't want to be. I hope I'm retired, but I hope I could still do it if I had to.

[0:39:39.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:39:40.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, like she did.

[0:39:41.9]

Justin Nystrom: How many tables do you normally cover here?

[0:39:44.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, it depends. We don't have stations here, you know. There's two dining rooms, and you write your name down on a list. So you come in, and if you're in this room, as the tables come in, they just hand them out, you know, and they go down the list. So like if a table sits here all night, it doesn't hurt your money, because you're still getting your turns. You see what I'm saying? Like at Outback, you had these four stations, four tables, and if the hostess didn't like you, you were just—they didn't seat you and you just didn't make money.

[0:40:19.5]

Justin Nystrom: Because every restaurant does this a little bit differently.

[0:40:21.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Right. There's so many—looking back at Outback, it was so screwed up, so screwed up the way they handled stuff. But, like I said, here, you know, it doesn't hurt you if, like, a table sits there all night long, you know. You're still getting your tables. Now, on—

[0:40:40.0]

Justin Nystrom: Do you think that has helped them retain people here on staff?

[0:40:45.0]

Wendy Gruntz: There's a lot of things here that helps them keep people, you know. The side work, there's barely any side work. I mean, the side work here's a joke, it really is, compared to other places, you know. What you got to do here, one person can do everything that you need to do in, like, fifteen minutes, if you had to. But at Outback, it'd take you, like, forty-five minutes after your shift.

[0:41:11.3]

Justin Nystrom: So what does side work here entail?

[0:41:13.8]

Wendy Gruntz: I mean, we got to, like, clean the bread oven and the tea machine, the coffee machine. You fold napkins when you get here, not after your shift, you know. You

just got to make sure there's enough napkins, you know. It's not like you have to fold so many, you know. Everybody just chips in and folds napkins. What else? I mean, pick up creamer and lemons, put them in the cooler when you're done, you know. Empty the ice out. It's just silly stuff, you know, like nothing crazy. When you get here in the morning, you know, you make sure there's sugars and the salt and peppers are full, and it's really a walk in the park as far as side work.

[0:42:09.1]

Justin Nystrom: That's great. So you and Louie have been here, I guess—are you two the longest-term employees here?

[0:42:16.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm. I think Louie's probably around sixteen years or seventeen years, and if I'm not mistaken, I started in [19]95, August 12th of [19]95.

[0:42:28.8]

Justin Nystrom: So I guess the one last thing is I want to talk a little bit about customers. So, like, Manale's can be a dressy place, but have you seen dressing at the table, like customer behavior, change over time? Or how about cell phones? Because you've been along for the rise of the phone. When was the first time you were like, "Wow, this is really an issue"?

[0:42:59.2]

Wendy Gruntz: [laughs] I don't know, I can't tell you when, but it's rude. People are rude with cell phones. Like, did you come here to eat, or did you come here to talk on your phone, or to text? And then people, like, sit and you got a table, four people, they're all on their phone, like, what are you doing, you know? You're not even conversing with each other. You're sitting there, you know.

Or you walk up to the table, and they act like you're not even there. It's like, "If you need food, you need to talk to me, you know. Get off your phone." A lot of ringers. [laughs] A lot of people who have it so loud, you know, or they're watching videos and it's like the whole restaurant can hear it. Yeah, people—it's rude. The phone service, their phone has gotten out of hand.

But when I first started, it was smoke. You could still smoke. And these four tables right here were the smoking section.

[0:43:52.8]

Justin Nystrom: In this room? [laughs]

[0:43:54.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. So, like, you could smoke at those four tables, but you couldn't smoke over here. [laughter] Also, when I first started here, we have a little cubbyhole. Our little waiter room is like this little closet, and they were allowed to smoke in there. It was absolutely horrible, like, because they a bunch of old ladies and they all, almost every one of them smoked. It was just terrible.

[0:44:20.3]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, my goodness. [laughs]

[0:44:22.7]

Wendy Gruntz: I'm so glad. We had a cigarette machine in the bar when I first started here.

[0:44:28.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. That's changed a lot.

[0:44:30.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, yeah.

[0:44:31.6]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. I believe those are—

[0:44:32.7]

Wendy Gruntz: They had a cell phone by the oyster bar. They had two cell phones by the oyster bar. [laughter]

[0:44:36.4]

Justin Nystrom: That people could use, I guess?

[0:44:40.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, yeah, people use them.

[0:44:42.0]

Justin Nystrom: Interesting. Like bag phones, I guess, back when they were—

[0:44:45.4]

Wendy Gruntz: Huh?

[0:44:46.3]

Justin Nystrom: The bag phone, like when they were first—

[0:44:48.6]

Wendy Gruntz: I'm talking about cell phones on the wall, pay phones.

[0:44:51.5]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, pay phones.

[0:44:52.8]

Wendy Gruntz: I mean, yeah, pay phone. Not cell phone. Yeah, pay phones on the wall.

[0:44:55.8]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, yeah. A different era. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:45:00.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:45:01.5]

Justin Nystrom: So where do you—let me rephrase this. If you were going to start all over again, other than finding a place that had benefits, what would you do?

[0:45:20.1]

Wendy Gruntz: I couldn't sit at a desk. I couldn't sit behind a cubicle all day. No. I'd have to have something where I'm interacting with people. Other than that, I don't know what I would do. But I enjoy my job. Like I said, the only thing I would do—and I tell my daughter this—I don't care if you have to start off making almost nothing, you start with a company that has benefits and you can work your way up. If you have to start at the bottom with barely any pay, if they have 401(k), health insurance, retirement, all that, you start at the bottom and you just stick with them and work your way up. Like these people, you know, retiring at thirty-something years old, military. My friend's husband retired from the military, you know. And for Entergy, people work for Entergy and retire. It would be nice to have a—you know what I'm saying?

[0:46:17.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:46:18.1]

Wendy Gruntz: Retire. Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five years and nothing.

[0:46:23.5]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah. But at the same time, you feel like this suits you as who you are.

[0:46:28.3]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, absolutely.

[0:46:29.3]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:46:30.6]

Wendy Gruntz: I *love* what I do. I'm not one of them people that dread coming to work.

I enjoy coming to work.

[0:46:37.4]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah. Great.

[0:46:39.6]

Wendy Gruntz: I do.

[0:46:40.2]

Justin Nystrom: Well, that's good, I guess, yeah.

[0:46:43.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:46:43.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What's your style? Do you have a style when you wait tables? What is your interaction with the customer? What do you feel is, like, the way you approach customers? Say it's a table of people you've never met before.

[0:46:59.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, it's funny, because, like, Louie—

[0:47:03.5]

Justin Nystrom: I've been waited on by Louie before, so he has a style.

[0:47:07.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, "Where are you from?" [laughs] I don't ask people that. I don't care where you're from. I don't care what you're in town for, you know. People don't come here to—I don't feel like people come here to have a conver—you know what I'm saying?

[0:47:20.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:47:20.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Now, my regulars, I mean, they all know me and I know them and I know their kids, and they watched my daughter grow up and, you know. But, like, normal people like I don't know, I mean, I'm not going to ask, "Oh, what you in town for? Where you from?" blah, blah, blah. Louie'll sit there and talk to them for an *hour*.

[laughs] It's just not me. You know what I'm saying? If I was going to a restaurant, I'd want to eat my food. I wouldn't want a waiter standing there talking to me the whole entire meal. But, hey, people love Lou, you know. It's just we're different, you know. Louie is—Louie's Louie. [laughs]

[0:48:08.1]

Justin Nystrom: This is very true.

[0:48:10.5]

Wendy Gruntz: I love me some Louie, but he is very unique.

[0:48:15.7]

Justin Nystrom: Do you ever find this job is stressful?

[0:48:25.5]

Wendy Gruntz: I don't know about stressful. Maybe hectic sometimes, but, you know. I work Friday, I open, I work a double on Friday, and I'm here from like 2:00 to 4:00 by myself, and I can get really busy. It gets kind of—it gets busy. I've had like almost this whole dining room full by myself.

[0:48:42.8]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, wow.

[0:48:43.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah, maybe not the big ones, but I've had a bunch of tables at one time, and, I mean, some people couldn't do that. Some people get three tables and they're like losing their mind. But it gets hectic, but, I mean, you can do it, you know. Like I said, some people can't. It gets hectic. I wouldn't say stressful, but it gets kind of crazy sometimes.

[0:49:13.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. How many tables—what's the most tables you've ever waited here?

[0:49:24.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Maybe eight.

[0:49:25.4]

Justin Nystrom: Wow.

[0:49:25.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Seven, eight. I'm telling you, sometimes between 2:00 and 4:00 on a Friday, it's pretty busy.

[0:49:34.6]

Justin Nystrom: Oh, really? So between 2:00 and 4:00 on a Friday is—

[0:49:39.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Well, I'm by myself, so that's what I'm saying.

[0:49:41.4]

Justin Nystrom: Oh.

[0:49:42.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Between 2:00 and 4:00, I'm by myself and, boy, I've gotten really busy before, really busy.

[0:49:48.8]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, people getting those long late lunches on a Friday?

[0:49:51.8]

Wendy Gruntz: Mm-hmm.

[0:49:52.7]

Justin Nystrom: And a lunch necessarily after 2:00 involves a fair amount of trips to the bar, I'm guessing.

[0:49:57.7]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah.

[0:49:57.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. What makes things go wrong?

[0:50:05.5]

Wendy Gruntz: When you can't get your stuff out the kitchen. When you can't get stuff, the bar's backed up or the kitchen's backed up, and you're just stuck because there's nothing you can do. You can't get your food, you can't get your drinks, so there's nothing you can do. You just got to wait.

[0:50:23.9]

Justin Nystrom: Oysters, I guess.

[0:50:25.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, yeah, oysters.

[0:50:27.2]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, because, of course, you're famous for your oysters here.

[0:50:29.6]

Wendy Gruntz: Yes, yes. And sometimes Thomas up there is packed, you know, and he's shucking for us *and* them, you know, so it gets—yeah.

[0:50:41.0]

Justin Nystrom: And even the world's best oyster shucker can only—

[0:50:43.5]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah. [laughs]

[0:50:44.8]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, great. Well, any last thoughts about this? Observations about being a waiter? Do you prefer “waiter” or “server”?

[0:50:57.0]

Wendy Gruntz: I guess waitress, I guess. It doesn't really bother me either way.

[0:51:05.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah. I’ve had some waiters who had strong opinions, “No, I’m a waiter,” you know.

[0:51:10.8]

Wendy Gruntz: No, it doesn’t matter. Whatever. I don’t care what people think. You know what I’m saying? I know how much money I make. [Nystrom laughs.] It’s like whatever. “Yeah, I’m a waitress. Think what you want. I’m the one who knows what I’m making.” You know what I’m saying? I come in, I work—I’m not going to say how much I make, but, I mean, I come in at 6:00 o’clock. We close at 9:00. Not too many people can make the money that I make working hours like that.

[0:51:39.9]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[0:51:41.2]

Wendy Gruntz: Yeah.

[0:51:42.1]

Justin Nystrom: Yeah, the flexibility, yeah.

[0:51:43.2]

Wendy Gruntz: I mean, a full-time—I don't work full-time. I can work, and I do a lot, work six nights a week, but I can still—it's probably like twenty-three hours, yeah, working six days.

I have my kid and I thought it was going to be different, you know. I had my child eleven years ago, and then I was like, "Oh, you know." When she started school, I was like, "Oh, I'm going to miss so much, you know, because she's getting—." But I come in at 6:00 o'clock. I get her off the bus or pick her up from school. I have time to eat with her, do her homework, and then, I mean, she's watching TV or whatever when I'm not there. And I come home, and sometimes she's still awake, you know. So, I mean, there's some people have to travel for their work, you know. They live out of town for months at a time, you know, for their job. So I don't feel like mine is—

[0:52:39.0]

Justin Nystrom: And you can be there in the morning too.

[0:52:40.9]

Wendy Gruntz: Oh, yeah, yeah. Exactly. That's good.

[0:52:44.7]

Justin Nystrom: It works, yeah. Well, great.

[0:52:48.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Like, I thought it was going to be harder on me than it is. But, like I said, I don't come in till 6:00 o'clock, so I have until like quarter after 5:00 to be with her, you know. Like I said, I have dinner cooked and everything by the time she gets home. But, anyway, I don't care what people call me. [Nystrom laughs.] Server, waitress, whatever.

[0:53:10.4]

Justin Nystrom: You're good.

[0:53:11.0]

Wendy Gruntz: I am what I am.

[0:53:12.8]

Justin Nystrom: Show you the money.

[0:53:13.5]

Wendy Gruntz: I look like a penguin, I don't care. [laughter] I don't get to get all dressy with heels and a pretty skirt every day, but I barely work and I make decent money. A lot of people wished they made what I made working sixty hours a week.

[0:53:31.0]

Justin Nystrom: Great, great. Well, Wendy, this has been fun. Thank you. And I guess you and I are of an age where—

[0:53:43.0]

Wendy Gruntz: Huh?

[0:53:43.6]

Justin Nystrom: You and I are of an age [Gruntz laughs], about the same age. So I'm going to sign off on the recording.

[End of interview]