**Marvin Matherne**
**Guy's Po-Boys – New Orleans, LA**
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Date: April 21, 2015
Location: Guy's Po-Boys – New Orleans, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Transcription: Deborah Mitchum
Length: One hour, forty minutes
Project: The Lives and Loaves of New Orleans

**Sara Roahen:** This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Tuesday, April 21, 2015. I'm at Guy's Po-Boys on Magazine Street in New Orleans, and I'm sitting here with the owner of Guy's Po-Boys, and I'm going to ask him to introduce himself. Will you please tell me your full name and, in your words, what you do for a living?

[00:00:25]

**Marvin Matherne:** My name is Marvin Marks Matherne. I make sandwiches for a living. Basically that's what I do. That's what I love to do, and plus I get to talk to people, and that's even better than making the sandwiches.

[00:00:37]

**SR:** I'm glad I asked you to introduce yourself because I've been coming here for almost fifteen years and I would have pronounced your last name incorrectly.

[00:00:46]

**MM:** Oh, really? Matherne, it's—.

[00:00:48]

**SR:** All right. Thank you. Can you please tell us your birth date and where you were born and raised?

[00:00:57]

**MM:** 8-28-58. I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. I lived here for about the first five years of my life and we moved to a suburb called Chalmette, and that's where you're going to hear all this crazy accent. That's where it all came from. But I lived in Chalmette until I was eighteen, and as soon as I was eighteen, back to New Orleans. I couldn't stand it. So I been living here for the last—how many? I'm fifty-seven now, so it's a little while.

[00:01:26]

**SR:** Do you live in this neighborhood?

[00:01:28]

**MM:** No. Actually I live right by the Huey P. Long Bridge, so technically not New Orleans, but I'm here seven days a week. I really live right behind that counter right there.

[00:01:43]

**SR:** I can attest to that. So, can you tell me a little bit about: How you did come here, to this place?

[00:01:50]

**MM:** Well, it started a long, long time ago. My grandfather lived next door to us and he had rental property up in New Orleans, so he used to bring me with him to help him fix the property every time somebody broke something. His sister-in-law was Tina Messina, who had Messina's down in the Warehouse District when it was actually warehouses and not condos. She had a little sandwich shop right across the street from the match factory, so we would stop there on the way home and we'd get to go behind the counter, and she'd fix you a little po-boy sandwich and you could get a Coke. To me, anything other than iced tea and Kool-Aid was the best. From that moment on I'm like, "I'm going to have one of these places and I'm going to have Cokes and sandwiches every day."

[00:02:43]

Then, being in Chalmette, po-boys are a pretty big thing down there, and our next door neighbor—well, actually behind us—moved in, an Italian family from Sicily who spoke no English. They just always spoke Italian. They went to work in a po-boy shop, one called Angelo's, and then eventually they opened up their own called Rocky & Carlo's, and I just

watched their whole life turn into a great place. [*Laughs*] So once again I'm like, "Okay, it's still sandwiches again. I have to get in the sandwich business."

[00:03:27]

It didn't kind of work out at first. At first I wanted to be a hairdresser, because it was in the '70s and hairdressing was like the coolest thing you could be. *Shampoo* was just out. So I tried that for a little while, taught school in the hairdressing field, and then I went on to find out that that was miserably frustrating. When you're cutting someone's hair and it doesn't come out right and they're crying and screaming, and I was like, "Oh, no. This is not for me. I'm not going out and dealing with this every day."

[00:04:02]

So then I went to work in the construction field with my father. I did that for about twelve years, saved all the money I made, and my wife and I at the time bought a little restaurant in the food court at Canal Place called the River Grill. And worked there until it was time to move on from the restaurant and the marriage. So I was without a restaurant, and I was friends with Guy, and I was doing a job at the park in the zoo. I was doing a job on a Komodo dragon exhibit. I was building an exhibit for the Komodo dragon, and every day I would stop here and he would complain about how much he hated it, hated it, hated it. So I said, "Hey, man, any time you're ready I will buy it." So every time I seen him I'm like, "You ready? You ready? You ready?" Until finally one day he said, "I am ready. I'm tired of hearing you ask me and I am tired of doing this job." So, he sold it to me, and that was twenty-two years ago, and it's been mine ever since.

[00:05:10]

**SR:** There are so many questions. That was a great—. [*Laughs*] That was a great history, and I didn't know most of it. Let me start by just asking maybe what Guy's last name was. [00:05:23]

**MM:** Guy Barcia. The Barcias owned grocery stores. The brothers all owned grocery stores. They had this one, which was moved from the Ninth Ward. So I've been here twenty-two years, they were here twenty years. Before that he had a grocery store in the Ninth Ward. He moved uptown, and this was a grocery store. Then they knew that they needed something else because the corner grocery stores were on the way out, so Guy had got his daddy to go on a vacation to Biloxi, and when he came back [*Laughs*] the groceries were gone. It was a sandwich shop basically from then on.
[00:06:09]

But the interesting part is I met everyone that owned this business. It was always a corner grocery store, and it was always owned by Italian immigrants from the '20s. I met the original owner [from] the '20s. He came in. He lived in Wisconsin. Joe—I can't think of Joe's last name right now, but I met him and his family, and they come back every so often. They all meet in New Orleans, and I met him, became friends with him. All of a sudden, about ten years ago, this old man came in here with a cigarette, little short guy, shuffling his feet with a cigarette, arguing with his daughter that, "I can go in here with a cigarette! I lived here." And she's like, "No, Daddy, you go to throw the cigarette away." He's like, "I don't have to throw the cigarette away! I'm going in here!" So I'm like, "You lived here?" He's like, "I lived here." So I'm like, "Smoke on in, man. Come on, come on." So he and I walked through the place, I showed him around. He told me how he used to sleep in the backyard in the barn. They had a barn behind the shop where they kept the mule and he slept back there. Met him. Then I met the Barcias. There's only one

person I never met who owned it for just a couple short years during the Depression. He didn't last, and I never got to meet him. Nobody even knows his name. It wouldn't do me any good because I forgot the other people's name anyway, [*Laughs*] obviously. So, it's kind of unique how I was able to chart the whole history of this little corner grocery.

[00:07:45]

**SR:** The man who came in with the cigarette—did he still live in New Orleans?

[00:07:50]

**MM:** Yeah, he lives out by the airport. Now, see, there's a little group of men that's in Sam's every morning. They're all retirees, they all owned grocery stores—his name was Joe also—and they always say, "That's the guy from Joe's place!" Every morning that I see them, same thing: "That's the guy from Joe's place!" So I think he's still alive, but he would have to be very old by now because he was shuffling when he walked in.

[00:08:22]

**SR:** When you say they meet at Sam's, you mean the store?

[00:08:26]

**MM:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:08:27]

**SR:** What do they do there?

[00:08:27]

**MM:** They get their little free coffee and their little free donuts and they all sit right at the doorway. It started out about five; now it's up to about twelve.

[00:08:37]

**SR:** What location? Out by—?

[00:08:40]

**MM:** Airline, Airline Highway. They all meet out there, a little group of old men. Then they go on and do their little groceries and stuff. But the interesting thing is, the Barcias, who are a big family in the po-boy world as it is now—Guy Barcia and Guy, Jr. had this place. The Barcias that owned Barcia's, that was a brother; the Spitales from Spitale Deli, that was another family member and that's all cousins. The sister's husband was a Spitale, and now they have Spitale's Deli, which is po-boys in Metairie. So they were pretty instrumental in changing corner groceries to po-boy shops.

[00:09:24]

**SR:** That's fascinating. I hadn't heard that. Thank you for that tip. Is Barcia's here in Uptown still open? I don't even know.

[00:09:30]

**MM:** Not sure. I'm really not sure. I work.

[00:09:34]

**SR:** [*Laughs*] Right, you're not eating at po-boy shops.

[00:09:39]

**MM:** [*Laughs*] Not too often.

[00:09:40]

**SR:** Do they have any particular order that struck you. Like when Guy's family comes in or when the other Joe came in, did they order anything in particular?

[00:09:56]

**MM:** No. Guy himself has never been in here since he sold me the business, never.

[00:10:02]

**SR:** Let me just back up a little bit to some of your family history. So your aunt, Tina Messina—where was Messina's? Where was the match factory?

[00:10:13]

**MM:** You know where Cochon is?

[00:10:19]

**SR:** Mm hmm.

[00:10:19]

**MM:** Right around the corner from there. They got a Messina's on that corner; that green building it was, right—. I don't know the name of the street. I can't remember the name of the street, but right—.

[00:10:31]

**SR:** But her shop doesn't exist anymore.

[00:10:34]

**MM:** No, no.

[00:10:35]

**SR:** What was that like? Was it like this, or was there a bar or a corner grocery?

[00:10:40]

**MM:** It was a little—. It was a sandwich shop. No groceries there. That was strictly for the working guys to come in and get their sandwiches, and it had about four tables. That's why we got to go sit in the back, because we couldn't take up a spot for the paying customers so we'd go sit in the back. And it was kind of like this was. This was the house. The house was all in the back, from here on back. The only part of the grocery was this little [part] right here.

[00:11:08]

**SR:** So you're saying like the—your dining room area.

[00:11:12]

**MM:** Right, the dining room area was the only grocery. And that's why the ceiling's so high, because they had cubbies all the way up. So they actually had the stick where you would grab the canned goods and pull it off and catch it on the way down.

[00:11:26]

**SR:** When you bought it, was it like that at all, or was it strictly a sandwich shop by that point?

[00:11:33]

**MM:** Strictly a sandwich shop.

[00:11:35]

**SR:** Do you remember what kind of po-boy you would get at your aunt's place?

[00:11:40]

**MM:** Ham and cheese. That's what you got, ham and cheese. I still could eat a ham sandwich every day of the week. I love ham sandwiches. But now I eat shrimp. I tell people, if you cut me open, my anatomy will be of a shrimp. It's like it's not going to be a human inside of here. I've packed so many shrimp in this body, it's got to be a shrimp.

[00:12:03]

**SR:** Like every day?

[00:12:05]

**MM:** Every day.

[00:12:07]

**SR:** Grilled shrimp or fried shrimp?

[00:12:09]

**MM:** Fried shrimp. I eat fried shrimp.

[00:12:13]

**SR:** So, you named your different professions: hairdressing; then you taught hairdressing; contracting work; and this. It was always with your hands. You always knew you wanted to work with your hands?

[00:12:27]

**MM:** Just can't work with this brain. [*Laughs*] This brain's not going to pay me much, but these hands, they're spectacular.

[00:12:34]

**SR:** You weren't intimidated by the hard work that you saw your aunt put into her work, and Guy?

[00:12:41]

**MM:** No. Hard work's never intimidated me. I work hard at whatever I do. I'm kind of the person that was raised to: if you're doing something, you better do it right because you're going to do it again. So I learned quickly to do it right the first time, and take pride in it. I take pride in every sandwich I make and I take pride in every job I do, and I try to tell people that today. It's like nobody wants to take pride in their job. They just feel like they should make this money. I'm like, "You should make this money? No. You should make your company money and then they'll pay you more money." Every job I've ever had, I was the last person ever to get laid off. I was always one of their coveted employees. Never a problem with working hard. It's what you're supposed to do. That's why you go. You go to work hard. You go to work—that's why they call it work—and then when you're there, while you're working, you might as well

work hard because you have to do as much work as you can. If you don't do plenty of work there's not going to be plenty of money coming into the company, so it's kind of like, "What are you doing? You just came here to just goof off?"

[00:13:45]

It would drive me crazy, like people today, on their cell phones at work? No. I can't. I can't see that. I was watching a construction worker this morning, a construction worker on his cell phone, and I'm like, what are you going to hammer with that? Plus I'm in traffic because they're doing the street and I'm thinking, "You should be finishing this street! I wouldn't have to be waiting at this red light this long. Put the cell phone down, grab a shovel!" Yeah, there's a crane working, but if you were working alongside the crane, then I would have to sit here maybe one week less, you know. It's like everybody, work hard. Do your job. Take pride. So, hard work is never going to ever scare me.

[00:14:26]

**SR:** Who taught you that work ethic? Was your dad like that? Your mom?

[00:14:30]

**MM:** Yeah, my dad was like that. My mom had five kids, so hard work was just [*Laughs*] part of every day, just washing the towels. My mother lives around the corner from me now in this assisted living home and she's like, "Oh, I hate for you to have to bring me some food," because I bring her food every night. I cook for her, because I'm cooking healthy for her. She can't have salt, she can't have sugar, so I'm steaming everything. She's eating quinoa. She's like, "What is that little stuff again? What is that little stuff again?" I'm like, "It's quinoa, Ma. It's a little grain. It's all right. It's good, it's like rice." [*Laughs*] [She says,] "Oh, like rice. All right, it's good. I'll try it." So she worked hard. We were laughing just at the towels. She had her

little towels—. For the whole week she had like three little towels and I'm like, "Ma, that was like one of my sisters' jobs right there: towel for the body, towel for the hair, towel for the makeup." Every one of them—. I had four sisters; there was two or three towels each. It's like we had baskets of towels every day. So, hard work for her had to come natural.

[00:15:35]

**SR:** So you were the only boy of five children?

[00:15:38]

**MM:** Yeah, in the middle. Two older sisters, two younger sisters.

[00:15:42]

**SR:** And you go from frying shrimp and make quinoa?

[00:15:46]

**MM:** Yeah. [Laughs]

[00:15:48]

**SR:** Do you eat pretty healthy too when you're not here?

[00:15:52]

**MM:** Yeah, I eat really healthy. Like, I had last night for dinner—. I'll tell you what I had last night. I had quinoa, smoked chicken—because I was smoking some pastrami, so I put two pieces of chicken on for me—because she had dinner with my sister last night. And I put it on some Romaine lettuce with a little pumpkin seeds and quinoa and smoked chicken and Romaine lettuce, black olives. And that was dinner for me.

[00:16:21]

**SR:** That sounds delicious. That's very—. You don't get anything like that in this place. Have you ever thought of introducing anything like that here?

[00:16:30]

**MM:** Well, Lela—who I should say she's my wife. I call her my "wif" because she's been "wif" me for ten years, but [*Laughs*] we have never gotten married. People think I'm crazy but I go, "This is my wif." They look at me like, what? [*Laughs*] I'm like, "Yeah, we're wif each other." So, she's a vegan, [*Laughs*] so you can imagine the contrast of worlds. And it drives me crazy when one of the vegans come in here for a po-boy and I'm like, [*Mimics yelling*], I kick and scream, "I have nothing for you! I have nothing for you!" And then I find something because I'm around it all day long. It's not that hard to figure out.

[00:17:05]

**SR:** They can have a French fry po-boy, can't they?

[00:17:08]

**MM:** Yeah, they can have a French fry po-boy if they want to weigh 300 pounds. [*Laughs*] You start eating French fry po-boys, you might as well just go grab yourself a roast beef.

[00:17:18]

**SR:** That's very true. Okay, not to dwell on the healthy stuff, but I like that because it's such a yin and yang. Did you eat like that before Lela?

[00:17:30]

**MM:** No. [*Laughs*] No, and I swore I would never, but it just so happened that if you're around it enough it wears off on you.

[00:17:38]

**SR:** Then I guess one more historical thing: the River Grill. Was that like upstairs where the restaurant is now? Is that still the River Grill?

[00:17:48]

**MM:** No. It closed about five years ago. She had it for thirty years. It had a nice run. It was fun, because it was a big grill in the middle of a food court and it was a chargrill, and we sold hamburgers. So, you know how a hamburger will just build up with grease? So it built up with grease and built up with grease, and I have about ten, fifteen of them on at a time. And when the little kids would come in front of the glass I would give one a little press and let the fire just [*Sound effect*]. So, it was a show. It was a nice show. It was interesting.

[00:18:26]

I'll tell you a little quick story on that. Emeril's fiancée was working at Saks. Saks was right next-door. So I saw a chef in the chef coat come sit and watch me every evening. You know, when he was waiting for his girl he would come sit and watch me. It was my birthday, we went to Commander's Palace, and we kept getting skipped, kept getting skipped, kept getting skipped. So it was my birthday and we're sitting at the bar, and it's your birthday, and you're young, and you're crazy, so we started—. I mean we just kept drinking and drinking and drinking. So finally when we got seated the chef came over and was like, "How is everything going?" and I'm like, "Man, things are going terrible." [*Laughs*] He's like, "What?" He said, "What could be going so terrible?" I said, "Well, we kept getting skipped." I probably shouldn't say that on any kind of tape, but we did get skipped and I knew it because we'd seen the people come and go in front of us. My friend that was with us, he and his wife, he was trashed. He was falling in his soup. I didn't get the rabbit I wanted. So, he grabbed me by the shoulders and he says, "I know who you are and I know where you work." I kind of got a little scared and I'm like, "Well, all right." He's like, "You work at that River Grill." He says, "I come watch you in the evening time." He says, "You really are fast. You're unbelievably fast on that grill." He said,

"It amazes me. You work too hard. You should have rabbit. It's your birthday. Come on, let's go." So we went down to the kitchen, he went and pulled out some rabbit, cooked it for me personally, brought it to my table, and said, "Anybody that works that hard on the grill should eat what they want to eat." It was pretty cool.

[00:20:08]

**SR:** That's a really good story. That's like Emeril before he was Emeril.

[00:20:12]

**MM:** Emeril before he was Emeril. Emeril when he was a chef at Commander's. And I never could really see his face good because he would always be far away and I was in the smoke-filled grill, but I just could see that white coat and I'd see it on a regular basis.

[00:20:26]

**SR:** That's a great story. Did you do po-boys there?

[00:20:31]

**MM:** No.

[00:20:32]

**SR:** Just burgers.

[00:20:33]

**MM:** Burgers, chicken, hot dogs, grilled stuff.

[00:20:35]

**SR:** I was thinking about the hard work, and here you pretty much have job security because you don't even have very many employees. [*Laughs*] What is your employee situation?

[00:20:48]

**MM:** Two. One to work the cash register, one to work the fryer, and I make the sandwiches and do all the cooking. That way it's done right. If I find somebody that can work good I wouldn't mind having help but they're going to have to be really good. They'd have to be better than me. My son's faster than me. He's become faster than me. He's been in the restaurant his whole life. He was in a playpen in the River Grill when he was a month old, two months old, so he's been in the restaurant. He used to work the register, because he went to St. George's [Episcopal School], and we used to sell cookies and breakfast to the Xavier Prep girls, so he would slide the register over to the step where he could reach the register and he would ring people up. He left St. George's at second grade. So how old was he? Young—seven, eight, working the register. He works in a restaurant in New York right now. [*Laughs*] He says he's never coming back to make po-boys again.

[00:21:53]

**SR:** We'll see about that, huh?

[00:21:55]

**MM:** We'll see.

[00:21:56]

**SR:** I don't think I ever knew that your son was in here, if there was a kid. So how old is he now?

[00:22:02]

**MM:** Twenty-six.

[00:22:04]

**SR:** But he's in the food service industry and he wants to cook?

[00:22:08]

**MM:** Oh, he went up there and was cooking, and then he realized that the waiters in a high-dollar restaurant make a lot of money. So they just offered him a sous-chef job last week and he said, "No, I think I'd rather carry the food than cook the food." [*Laughs*] It's twice the price.

[00:22:27]

**SR:** Especially if you're living in New York.

[00:22:29]

**MM:** Yeah, well, that's a whole other story. [*Laughs*] That's expensive.

[00:22:32]

**SR:** Huh. But he can come here and work if you want, like—

[00:22:36]

**MM:** Yeah, he's worked here—.

[00:22:37]

**SR:** —he knows the place.

[00:22:38]

**MM:** He's worked here every Saturday through high school, college. I would make him come from Baton Rouge in to work on Saturday. Now, he can go back, but if you're going to get anything out of this pocket, you'd better be ready to work yourself because I work hard and if you want to live my life you're going to have to work. Everybody's got to work.

[00:22:57]

**SR:** What's his name?

[00:22:59]

**MM:** Cody.

[00:23:00]

**SR:** [*This portion of the interview has been omitted.*] What about, when you bought the place, did you make any attempt to keep the menu the same, or keep anything the same, or did you just start from scratch?

[00:23:24]

**MM:** I kept everything the same, everything exactly the same. The only thing changed was Guy wasn't here and I was here. I kept the exact same staff, exact same menu, never went up on the prices, exact same tables. If you're going to buy something, why would you change it? I'm going through that right now with this little sushi restaurant that I eat at every Friday night for the last five years. I order pretty much the same thing, go pick it up, and I go home because I don't want to be in a restaurant. I'd rather eat at home. You know, people are like, "Oh, it's a little cold." I'm like, "It's sushi. It's supposed to be cold." I hope it's cold. If it's hot [*Laughs*] I'm going to be really kind of leery about eating this. But they changed everything. They changed the cooks, they changed the menu, they changed everything, and now we don't go back. This is like the fifth week we haven't been back. It's—. Why would—?

[00:24:17]

No. If you buy something, take your time in changing it. You're going to alienate so many people that haven't become your customer yet. They're a customer of Guy's, they're not my customer. Now they're my customer. Now they wouldn't know Guy if they ran into him. If Guy came in here tomorrow they wouldn't—. They would call me Guy. They'd be like, "Hey, Guy!" And he'd say, "Hey!" And they'd be like, "No." And [he'd say,] "That's Marvin, I'm Guy! Wait, wait!" But I never changed a thing. I totally can't understand why somebody would

do that. It's like, you bought it. You spent your money. If you want to open your own up, don't give somebody your money. Go rent an empty place and save that money.

[00:25:00]

**SR:** That makes a lot of sense. So what was the menu like? Or, I guess I should say: How is it different now from when you bought it?

[00:25:09]

**MM:** Basically this is a sandwich shop. This is a po-boy shop, an original, old-fashioned po-boy shop. You're not going to get a foie gras po-boy here. You're going to get a shrimp sandwich, catfish sandwich—I haven't really changed anything—ham, cheese, turkey, roast beef, sausages. We put alligator sausage on, since now it's a really good product. Alligator sausage is one of the best tasting sausages you can get now. There's some sausage-making companies that's opened up and they're really good, so I put a few extra sausages on. Basically it's pretty much still the same, and as long as I'm here it's going to probably say the same. I had a man arguing with me today that I should have oysters and I'm like, "Well, you should have a po-boy shop since you know so much about it." That was the end of the argument. I'm like, "I don't want to sell oysters." It's not what I want to sell.

[00:26:03]

**SR:** I never even—. I mean I have a hard time fluctuating from a couple different things that I get here, but I never even noticed that you didn't have oysters. You never have?

[00:26:13]

**MM:** No. I don't sell oysters. I used to tell people, "If you eat the middle of a tree, you're eating wood. If you eat the middle of a rock, what are you eating?" [*Laughs*] They kind of get

offended by that. I had to quit saying that. I had to strip that from my argument. I just now say no.

[00:26:30]

**SR:** Is that because you don't like eating them yourself?

[00:26:34]

**MM:** I love oysters. I love oysters. An oyster Caesar salad, to me, is one of the best things you could eat. It's unbelievable. But it's just—. If you fry oysters in the fryer with shrimp and catfish, they're going to taste like oysters. Where a shrimp's not overbearing and it's not going to influence the catfish flavor, the catfish is not going to influence the shrimp flavor, so I feel like putting those two in the fryer together, it's no problem. But if you start putting all kind of—. Oysters just influence the flavor. They're strong.

[00:27:08]

**SR:** Yeah. I've had a lot of people tell me that. You almost need a separate fryer for your oysters. Now that we're talking about this, without divulging any of your secrets—I'm not asking you to do that at all—but I'd love to ask you about a few sandwiches in particular that I know are—well, my favorites and/or customer favorites. Can you talk a little bit about your grilled shrimp, because I haven't had grilled shrimp like you make it anywhere else.

[00:27:36]

**MM:** It's pretty basic. We just put—. I hate to say the seasonings I put on it, too, but I guess it's really not any big secret. We just put Season-All, garlic, pepper, lemon, Worcestershire, liquid margarine, and put it on the grill and let it roll.

[00:27:58]

**SR:** When you say "grill," it's like the griddle.

[00:28:01]

**MM:** Griddle, yeah. It's really a griddle. It's not a grill. We have no gas. Everything here is electric. If I had gas that would be—. "Cooking with gas—what?" [*Laughs*]

[00:28:12]

**SR:** Have you had—? I mean where did you get—? Not that it's super complicated, but where did you get that idea? Because I haven't had grilled shrimp like that somewhere else.

[00:28:19]

**MM:** When I was a hairdresser there was a place on Carrollton Avenue called the Streetcar, and the Streetcar closed up, and they sold grilled shrimp sandwiches. So when they closed up there was no one else selling grilled shrimp sandwiches, so I'm like, "All right, well, this is something I can take and use." I guess it's been—. It's been a while. It's been a long time that we've been doing it.

[00:28:45]

**SR:** Since I've been coming, I think, although the thing that I came for originally—. I didn't order it the first time, but somebody sent me here to get your catfish. Somebody told me, "This is the best catfish po-boy in the city." Again, I'm not asking you to divulge secrets, but what—? I agree, but what makes your catfish po-boy so good, do you think?

[00:29:07]

**MM:** We cut it thin. Not as thin as Middendorf's; a little thicker than that. We cut it thin, and I use yellow corn flour. I'm not going to tell you what seasonings I put in it, but I use yellow corn flour instead of cornmeal. So the corn flour's a lot lighter and we don't really like pack it on, just kind of a light coating, but it's got to be coated all the way. I think that keeps it really light.

[00:29:36]

**SR:** It is light. So you cut it—like, you get a catfish fillet and then you cut it even thinner, huh?

[00:29:41]

**MM:** Yeah. I get the biggest catfish I can get, so that way I can adjust the size that I cut it. If you get the little smaller pieces—. Everybody says, "Why don't you just get the smaller pieces?" I'm like, "Because they're fat in the middle, where if I get them big I can cut them on the slicer and—." I cut everything on a slicer. [*Laughs*] People will be like, "You cut that on a slicer?" I'm like, "Yeah." I couldn't live without a slicer. I cut onions on the slicer, everything, [*Sound effect of slicing*]. It goes fast.

[00:30:08]

**SR:** It does go fast. How about your roast beef? I know that people love your roast beef here. You don't just buy the loaf and slice it?

[00:30:17]

**MM:** No. Right now I'm using flat bottom round, which is a rump roast, the whole rump roast, and we cook them here. I used to cook them actually in the oven, but now I switched to these little portable ovens because they can just maintain all the moisture. They seal up pretty good, and I cook them in there.

[00:30:41]

**SR:** I don't know what that is. What do you mean by "portable oven?"

[00:30:43]

**MM:** Like—. [*Moving away from the microphone*]

[00:30:46]

[00:30:50]

**SR:** Oh! Oh, yeah, like a NESCO?

[00:30:53]

**MM:** I don't know what a NESCO is. I guess like a Dutch oven or something? Not a Dutch oven. A Dutch oven—.

[00:30:59]

**SR:** Like a Crock Pot?

[00:31:00]

**MM:** Like a big metal Crock Pot, exactly. It's like the same theory as a Crock Pot. So if you want to leave them in there you can let it cook all the way down to [falling apart], but I don't do that. I cook them to medium and then we slice them. Then they cook the rest of the way in the gravy. We make our own gravy. Everything's made from scratch.

[00:31:20]

**SR:** Yeah, I think the gravy has a lot to do with it. I get the gravy when I get the French fry po-boy.

[00:31:28]

**MM:** I don't like roast beef personally—too sloppy. [*Laughs*] I could never sit here with a roast beef sandwich and eat it. I would be so self-conscious. I'd be like, "Oh, God! It's dripping! It's on my hands!" People love to count how many napkins: "Hey! That was twenty napkins! Hey! This was fifteen napkins!" I'm like, oh my God. No. Too messy.

[00:31:50]

**SR:** That's funny. What about—? What other one did I—? So, I would like to know—. Well, you know, we talked earlier before we started recording about how the writer for *The*

*Times-Picayune*, Brett Anderson, said that the best thing he ate last year was your fried shrimp po-boy. You know, I tend toward the grilled shrimp here. I'm not sure I've ever had the fried shrimp, but do you have a—.

[00:32:16]

**MM:** [You haven't?]

[00:32:17]

**SR:** I don't think so. Do you have a secret with that?

[00:32:20]

**MM:** No, no secret with that. Same batter as the catfish. It's just I get good shrimp. I only buy shrimp from Piazza's, Paul Piazza. That's the only shrimp I'll sell, and if they close up—. [*Laughs*] They're not going to close up, but if they ever close up then I don't know what I would do. But that's the only place I buy shrimp from.

[00:32:43]

**SR:** So they're local shrimp?

[00:32:44]

**MM:** They're locally processed; they're locally caught in the Gulf. They're Gulf shrimp, they're all Gulf shrimp, and I adjust, you know, my sizes as to what's the best shrimp at the time. I'll go from a forty-fifty to a fifty-sixty. Sometimes you can get sixty-seventies that are big, fat, plump. I adjust it.

[00:33:07]

**SR:** Now, what about if somebody wants a po-boy "dressed?" What does that mean to you? Does it mean the same thing for every sandwich?

[00:33:15]

**MM:** No, it doesn't mean the same thing for every sandwich. That's something that I didn't change. That's something that I definitely did not change. Guy told me they put ketchup and hot sauce on—. Guy put ketchup and hot sauce on any seafood sandwich that he dressed, so I thought that was the most ridiculous thing in the world because to me "dressed" was mayo, lettuce, tomato, pickle. That's pretty standard. But, nope: we put ketchup and hot sauce on the seafood. Not on the grilled shrimp. I don't put ketchup on grilled shrimp. I'll put the hot sauce, but I'm not putting ketchup on grilled shrimp or grilled fish. Not happening. And mustard on the blue meats. Now, I still don't know what a "blue" meat is. [*Laughs*] I have not figured that out yet, but I guess—. But I know that smoked sausage is a blue meat and ham is a blue meat and pastrami is a blue meat, so they get mustard.

[00:34:10]

**SR:** Who called it "blue" meat?

[00:34:12]

**MM:** Guy. Guy told me—. The week that I worked with him before I took over, that's what he told me: "That's the blue meats." Have you ever heard of blue meats before? I've never heard that. I guess because they got that blue tint to them? I don't know. I don't know.

[00:34:28]

**SR:** Is roast beef a blue meat?

[00:34:29]

**MM:** No. [*Laughs*] It doesn't get mustard. I don't know what a blue meat is, but that's what we do. And on alligator I put Creole mustard.

[00:34:40]

**SR:** What about on the chicken? That's not a blue meat, I'm guessing.

[00:34:44]

**MM:** No, that's a white meat. [*Laughs*] No, just mayo, lettuce, tomatoes, and pickles. People get mad when we tell them we put the ketchup and the hot sauce on. They're like, "That's not dressed!" But it's dressed here, so.

[00:34:57]

**SR:** Do they get mad? Because I never would order, like, a seafood po-boy that way, but I'm always happy when it comes that way.

[00:35:07]

**MM:** Me too. I would never eat hot sauce. Hot sauce ain't one of my things, you know. It's not what I do. But when I make a mistake—which rarely happens, of course—but every once in awhile sometimes I'll make an extra shrimp sandwich and it's dressed and I take it to eat and it's like, "This really is good." You know, with this ketchup and this hot sauce. It gives it a little something extra.

[00:35:30]

**SR:** I wanted to ask you about off-menu po-boys. And I'm looking at your menu on the wall right now, and I think that there's one on the menu that used to be off the menu. Can you talk about that one?

[00:35:41]

**MM:** The Bomb? Yeah, the Bomb's the bomb. It's something I wouldn't even sell to people. Right next door used to be—. Galactic used to live in the other half of that house right here. You ever heard of the band, Galactic?

[00:35:54]

**SR:** Yeah, but can you tell for the record what that band is?

[00:35:58]

**MM:** It's, I don't [know]. I guess a funk band? You would say it was a funk band. I'm not a real music person, but—.

[00:36:06]

**SR:** Like New Orleans funk, maybe.

[00:36:08]

**MM:** Yeah, New Orleans funk kind of band. They all came here to go to Tulane. They were from Washington [D.C.], most of them were from Washington [D.C.], and the brother used to like to fish. One of the boys loved to fish so he would go catch redfish, and they would come over after hours and ask me to cook the redfish for them. So they were getting in a health kick, one of them—. Stanton Moore, the drummer, was getting in a health kick, and he's like, "Can you grill it?" So I'm like, "Yeah, I could grill the fish." So I grilled the fish, put the shrimp on top, and then—because I already was grilling shrimp at the time. So we put the fish and the shrimp, and then we decided to put cheddar cheese and Swiss cheese on top of it and everybody was like, "Whoa! This is the bomb! This is the bomb!" So they started telling people, "Oh, go to Guy's and get the Bomb!" And I really never did ever price it out. I didn't want to really add anything to my menu. So I said, "No, we don't have that. We don't have that." [*Laughs*] It's like you had to be special to get that. Then eventually the word just got out so much that we had to put it on the menu, recently. This new menu it's on. It's the first time it's ever been on the menu, is this new menu that we just came out with.

[00:37:23]

Something else new is the chicken with the Canadian bacon. I make my own Canadian bacon. It's unbelievable. Chicken with Canadian bacon with the cheddar and the Swiss cheese on top of it, with some honey mustard.

[00:37:35]

**SR:** How do you make Canadian bacon?

[00:37:39]

**MM:** You brine it for three to four days.

[00:37:43]

**SR:** You brine what?

[00:37:44]

**MM:** Pork loin, brine the pork loin. It's in a lot of books. You can find the brine anywhere really. It's pickling spices, garlic, sage, thyme, and when you boil it, it smells unbelievable. It smells like clean, clean. I guess it's the sage, when it boils. It just really gets this unbelievable fragrance. Then you brine it for three or four days, dry it, and then smoke it.

[00:38:21]

**SR:** I got to put that on my list of things to try at home.

[00:38:26]

**MM:** Yeah, Canadian bacon's so good, and it's so cheap to make and so expensive to buy. It's like, Canadian bacon—you buy Canadian bacon that doesn't even have the smoked flavor and it's totally expensive. I'm like, I make everything. We brine our own pastrami. I make my own pastrami.

[00:38:42]

**SR:** What is your most popular po-boy?

[00:38:48]

**MM:** Fried shrimp. Fried shrimp pretty much. Anybody asks me what to get, that's what I'm telling them. It's New Orleans. You know, you have a responsibility to your city when you cook in a city, and a lot of people don't look at it like that but I do. Those people I was just talking to right there, they're coming back from Australia. They're coming here tomorrow to have a sandwich. The girl brought them here because she got a sandwich here when she came the first time from Australia. So now they're coming back and she wanted to bring them here to show them that. She's not going to be able to come with them, but [she said,] "This is where you come." She gave them a menu, and they're going to go back and they're going to talk about: "Oh, I had this sandwich, this po-boy sandwich," and I want them to say it was great. I want everybody that comes in here to say it was one of the best things they ever ate, and to me fried shrimp's the best thing I ever ate so it's kind of like that's where I push them to. But I think it is our best sandwich.

[00:39:47]

**SR:** Are there other off-the-menu sandwiches that you want to mention that people order a lot?

[00:39:57]

**MM:** No, not really. Pretty much now everything's on the menu. We reformatted it where stuff could fit, like the Canadian bacon and chicken sandwich. That's new. I'll make people a BLT on French if they really, really want me to, but not right now. I've kind of given up on all that experimental stuff because these are the sandwiches that work. This is traditional po-boys, and I just have enough trouble keeping up with making them, so if I start getting too many

different options—. I don't want to open up a menu and have it ten pages of sandwiches. It's too much. Simple, plain, quick, efficient: that's the way I like to be.

[00:40:44]

**SR:** What about this thing that my household started ordering a few years ago, which is the [*Laughs*] fried catfish—

[00:40:52]

**MM:** With potato salad.

[00:40:53]

**SR:** —with potato salad on the sandwich. I know I've asked you this before, but if you wouldn't mind indulging me again: How did we start ordering that?

[00:41:02]

**MM:** My daddy liked ham sandwiches with potato salad on it, and so I think your husband said that he really liked the potato salad and he really liked the fish and we kind of got to talking about it. I think—I have a hard time remembering, but Doc liked it and that's where we went with it, you know. [*Laughs*] I know when somebody comes in and orders a fried catfish with potato salad, I'm like, "Oh, you know Sara." [*Laughs*]

[00:41:29]

**SR:** Other people don't order that?

[00:41:32]

**MM:** Not unless y'all send them or—. [*Laughs*] It's a very unique sandwich. It's awesome though.

[00:41:39]

**SR:** It is awesome. I have a hard time ordering anything else now, because when I get a craving for Guy's that's kind of what I crave.

[00:41:47]

**MM:** You know people don't even ever try other sandwiches here. They get their sandwich and that's what they get. They tell me, "I like roast beefs." I'm like, "We have a great roast beef," [and they say,] "Oh, really?" I open it up and I'm like, "Look. Look at the meat. This is a big, beautiful piece of meat here." [They say,] "Yeah, yeah. That's beautiful. That's pretty. Give me a shrimp sandwich." And it's like, "But I thought you said you like roast beef?" [And they say,] "Yeah, but I'm here. I'm getting this. This is what I get here." So I'm like, "Well, you get roast beef other places. Why don't you just try one, one time, when you want to have a roast beef? Come here. Try it." But it's like, "If I come here, I'm getting shrimp." It's like, oh, I can't solve that problem.

[00:42:31]

**SR:** Yeah. I got that same problem. So I think someone told me—. Do you do grilled onions?

[00:42:35]

**MM:** Yeah. Yeah, you can put grilled onions on anything.

[00:42:38]

**SR:** That's what someone told me, to come get—. Yeah, I see that there now. Grilled onions with the alligator sausage, is what someone told me to get.

[00:42:45]

**MM:** Yeah, that's good. Grilled onions on grilled shrimp is good too, because we mix it all together, chop them up and mix it all in with the grilled shrimp.

[00:42:53]

**SR:** Okay, I'm getting hungry. [*Laughs*] How about—? Well, I am curious about one other po-boy in particular, which is the French fry po-boy, which we kind of addressed earlier. I really like that po-boy, but it's very old school. Do many people order that?

[00:43:10]

**MM:** Not anymore. That's the original po-boy, from what I'm told, from all the people that I've talked to throughout the time. That's the original po-boy, and that's why they called it a po-boy: because the transit workers—across the street from Martin's it was, I believe. Martin's? They had their union hall or their plant or whatever it was. They were on strike and they used to eat at the guy's place all the time and then they didn't have any money, so he would just dip the bread in the gravy and put the French fries on it, pour a little gravy on the top of it, dress it up with mayo, lettuce, tomatoes, and pickles, and sold them that for a real reasonable price so they could eat while they were off of work, knowing that he would still keep his customer base. He might not make as much money, but as soon as the strike was over he would be back to selling them roast beefs again. And the sandwich just caught on. I don't know what they was using that bread for before that, if that was the original po-boy, though. I really wish I knew more about that. You should write a book on that.

[00:44:07]

**SR:** I have heard that they were making sandwiches with that bread before but not calling it that. I don't know.

[00:44:15]

**MM:** Oh, so that's how it got to be a po-boy. Other than that, before that, it was just a sandwich, probably. That sounds reasonable.

[00:44:23]

**SR:** How many French fry po-boys do you sell in a week?

[00:44:27]

**MM:** Three. That few. That few.

[00:44:32]

**SR:** It's a real outlier. Will you tell me what you were telling me before we started recording, about the volume that you've done?

[00:44:45]

**MM:** We figured it out and, underestimating, the bare minimum, 750,000. 750,000 sandwiches I've made personally. Probably more. So, taking the bare minimum and stretching it out, I should go to about sixty-two before I make a million. I'm going to get a little better grip on it when I get a little closer to sixty-two, but at one million, when I feel like it's one million, [*Laughs*] in my calculation it's one million, it's the last sandwich I'm ever going to make. I'm going to put it down. I'll let everybody else have whatever they want. [*Laughs*] I'm walking out. I'm done. A million sandwiches is more than these hands, any hands, should ever make. That's a lot of sandwiches. A million sandwiches? 750,000 is an incredible amount. People are like, "You don't even look and every one of them's exactly the same." I'm like, "Yeah. They should be. I've done it three quarters of a million times." You do anything three quarters of a million times, [*Laughs*] if you can't do it with your eyes closed.

[00:45:48]

It's a lot of sandwiches but, you know, think of it like this: that's 750,000 people that I got to talk to, and I love to talk to people. That's what I like about this whole place, is the kitchen's open. You can watch me make your sandwich. It's not the cleanest building in town.

It's not dirty, but it's old. It's been here since 1923, that I know of—'22, something around up in there. So, it's an old building, but it's open and you can see. You can see there's nobody dropping food on the floor and putting it on your plate. There's none of that going on. Not that that ever happens in restaurants; just people are always, "Oh, I don't know what goes on back there. I don't know." But here you know. There's no question about it. You know who's making your sandwich, you can watch me make your sandwich. You can tell me, "Oh, put a little more ketchup. Oh, put a little more this. Oh, put a little more that." You're in on the cooking of your sandwich, you're in on your food, you know what's happening, and I get to talk to people, and I can talk while I make sandwiches, I guess because I've done it three quarters of a million times. [*Laughs*] I don't have to look too much any more. I can hold a conversation. If somebody knows me they'll come in and be like, "Why don't you shut up and go faster?" I just have to laugh, like, "You think you can go faster? You come back here."

[00:47:07]

**SR:** It doesn't bother you when people are looking over your shoulder and micromanaging their sandwich?

[00:47:13]

**MM:** No, it doesn't bother me at all. It's their food. They're eating it. You know, when you're putting something in your mouth, I understand you're concerned. You are what you eat and if somebody's not putting enough ketchup—. You know, I look at it like this. This is how I treat every customer. Nobody skips line, and there's a line in here sometimes—all the time. You're pretty much going to wait behind somebody. You could be the most important person in the city, which I've served most all of them, or you could be somebody who scraped up this money by begging to get this sandwich. But this is how I treat everybody: like if you were on a

first date with a girl or, you know, you saved this money up to come here with your wife and this is your date of the year. This is your day of the year. I treat your food like this is your day. You know, this is your day. Because some people don't get to come enjoy this luxury every day and some people come in here and, you know, get a large sandwich, eat half of it, and be like, "Oh, man, that's too much! I should've never got a large." I treat it sacred kind of, in a way. It's like, I'm fixing it, for one thing, so my name is on it; you're eating it, so your body's on it. It's very special, and I treat everybody like it's their last meal.

[00:48:40]

**SR:** That's a great philosophy, and I feel like it comes through in the sandwiches. I've never been here when you weren't making the sandwiches. Does that ever happen?

[00:48:51]

**MM:** Cody. Cody's the only person ever really to make sandwiches.

[00:48:54]

**SR:** I know that you took a vacation last month. Did you shut down for that?

[00:49:03]

**MM:** I shut down. If I'm not here, I shut down. Because if I'm here—. Nobody else knows what to do. They don't even know how to turn the stuff on. Nobody—. [*Laughs*] My son knows and I know and that's pretty much it.

[00:49:17]

**SR:** Can you talk about your clientele a little bit? I mean you just kind of addressed it, that you've had the most important people in here. I've seen a lot of UPS drivers here. What spectrum does your clientele come from?

[00:49:39]

**MM:** The UPS phenomenon changed the whole UPS lunch program. [*Laughs*] They changed it. We used to have—. First it started off with one UPS truck. Then he told a friend, "Hey, there's a great sandwich shop. The guy really don't mind that we park the trucks around there. I park my truck there." So his friend came from the route next door. Then they were coming from all the way up by Canal Street. There was like seven, eight UPS trucks around here every evening. They would get here at 3:00, leave at 4:00. People would come, bring their packages, come to get their packages. Even the boss used to bring packages here for me to give to the drivers. Like, "Hey, I know Glen's going to be here this evening. I want you to give him these two packages." And, "You mind if we store some of these packages in the back of your shop while we wait on the driver?" It got to be a UPS [*Laughs*] hub, kind of.
[00:50:34]

But then a new boss took over and he and I—. He came in here and I told him, you know, This is my neighborhood, I run this neighborhood." [*Laughs*] And he comes in giving us all kind of brash talk, like, "These are my drivers," and I'm like, "Wait, these are my customers, man. You don't come in here like–." Come in here, really hassling people while they were having lunch in my restaurant? No. He's like, "Oh, these are my drivers." I'm like, "No, these are my customers. This is my neighborhood." So he kind of took—. He showed me who the boss was. [*Laughs*] He stopped it. He stopped them from eating. Now they can't even go off their route to get lunch anymore because of that situation. And truthfully it was a great thing for them because they all could, "Hey, you got a package over here? Give me this one. Give me this one." They would trade up and give their stuff away and everybody would get their self organized. And, like I said, the boss prior to that, he used me as an advantage, not as: I'm going to show you who the boss is. It probably was my fault. I was a little sarcastic at the time. [*Laughs*]

[00:51:38]

**SR:** Wow, end of an era.

[00:51:40]

**MM:** Yeah, the end of that era. But my customers range, like I said, from—. Well this neighborhood has changed dramatically. The reason why we close at 4:00: because it was dangerous to leave here after 4:00. That's the reason why we're always closed at 4:00. It was very dangerous to leave out of the store after 4:00 when I first got here. Of course at that time rents were like $125 dollars a month. Now they're $2,000 a month. Same little places. The little place around the corner sold for $48,000; then it went to $900,000 and something. The last sale was $900,000, almost a million dollars, for the same little house that sold for $48,000 a couple years ago. So this neighborhood's changed. My clientele here has gone from New Orleanians—. When I first took over I had a book with people's names, and they didn't pay. They just went in the book. At the end of the month when they got their money they would come and square up their book and we were straight. Now—. You know, they were all New Orleanians, people who had lived here for generations and generations.

[00:52:47]

Recently I had to paint something on the front of the shop—. I'll tell you how my clientele has changed. I had to paint something on the front of the shop, so I was in paint clothes, all dirty, and everybody that walked past, I made it a point—just like most New Orleanians that was born and raised here, they're going to tell you "hello," "good morning," "good evening," "hi," kind of to be friendly but kind of to check out to see where you're at. You know, how you answer them back is how they're going to handle you the rest of this moment that you're together. If you're friendly and nice they're going to handle you friendly and nice. If you're, you

know, cruel and crass they're going to handle you the same way. It's kind of a little feel-out process. I told everyone that passed here, about thirty people, "Good morning," because it was early on a Sunday morning. "Good morning, good morning." They would look at me now like, "Huh?" Like, "Who are you talking to?" So that's—. But, you know, they're nice people. They're just not friendly [*Laughs*] or not used to the culture of New Orleans, I guess.
[00:53:53]

But, yeah, it's a wide variety of people that eat here, and like I said, they know if you're coming here you're going to wait. You're not skipping. You can't buy your way in here. You can't tip your way in. There's no—. It's not going to happen like me and Emeril. [*Laughs*]
[00:54:08]

**SR:** I've noticed that about, well, the neighborhood, I guess. And New Orleans in general, maybe. Yeah, it's a different way of being. It's not necessarily unsafe to leave here after 4:00, but it's a different—. It's different in all kinds of ways.
[00:54:27]

**MM:** But, you know, the people that was originally here, they still come back. They come back. All the old neighborhood, they come back. They come back, and it's like seeing a family member. You grew to know them. I knew their kids. I'm serving like third-generation kids now. It's like, "I know you, I know your daddy, I know your grandpa." It's New Orleans. It's kind of unique. I guess in most of the rest of the world people move. They grow up and they can't wait to get out of there and they're gone. But here, you raise your kids in the same neighborhood, same house. That's how it used to be. It's changing. I guess everything's changing, but still there's some left, little pockets of New Orleans that still have generations of families.

[00:55:20]

**SR:** Maybe there's something about a po-boy which is like: where you used to get it, that's where you want it.

[00:55:26]

**MM:** Yeah. Oh, there's a whole po-boy war. Not between us. Not between the people who make the po-boys. We're pretty cool with each other. But if you're a Guy's person or if you're a blah, blah, blah person, it's like, "My place is the best! No, my place is the best! They do this! They toast this! They do that!" It's totally, totally competition, who's—. I've had people bring people in here like with other sandwiches from other places, and they get a sandwich and they break them open and they compare my place to your place: "Look at this! Look at the meat there! Look at the meat you got here!" It's crazy.

[00:56:08]

Now you see, me, personally, I love a Rocky & Carlo's shrimp sandwich, and I get that sandwich with mayo only. They use a different cornmeal. I'm not going to give their cornmeal out, but they use a different corn meal so, every once in a while—. I can't get there anymore because I work six, seven days a week, so I can't get there anymore, but when I want that Rocky's shrimp sandwich I'll go buy me their kind of corn[meal] and I make it myself. [*Laughs*] It's like pseudo-Rocky's sandwich, I guess.

[00:56:40]

**SR:** But you don't get it with lettuce and tomato or anything? Just mayo?

[00:56:44]

**MM:** No. That sandwich, mayo only.

[00:56:46]

**SR:** It's funny. You associate certain places with certain tastes. You mentioned toasting. Toast or no toast?

[00:56:55]

**MM:** No toast here. We don't toast. We get our bread fresh twice a day. I get my bread delivered to me twice a day. Why would I want to take a beautiful piece of French bread and toast it? It's already crispy on the outside. Do I want it crispy in the middle? Not really. I don't think that's—. You know, I don't want to bite into a crispy middle on a sandwich. I had a girl have me press a sandwich yesterday. She had a shrimp sandwich; she wanted it pressed. "Can you press it?" I'm like, "Yeah, I can press it." And the friend with her is like, "Can you not press my half, because I don't like that." I'm like, "Okay, no problem." I'm like, "I'll press her half." I'm like, "You want starch or no starch?" [*Laughs*] She's like [*In a high voice*], "I just want it pressed."

[00:57:44]

**SR:** Someone told me yesterday, actually, that by Biloxi they press their sandwiches.

[00:57:50]

**MM:** Because they're getting stale bread. They're not getting the fresh bread, and if you put—. You can put French bread, you can put po-boy bread—. We call it French bread, right, but originally—. I don't know how much you know this, but originally all the French bread bakers made a French bread. It was a wider loaf of bread, it was kind of shaped like a football, it was about eighteen inches long, and it had a crispier outside with the same doughy middle. They would make that; that was their original bread. Then they made the po-boy bread. So I guess—. I don't know, I just—. You could freeze it. You can freeze the po-boy bread, but it kind of separates a little bit. It's not ever going to be the same. You won't have that cracking crispness.

[00:58:45]

Now, they tell me that they can't make this bread anywhere but New Orleans. I don't believe that at all because I tell people when they always tell me, "Oh, you should open one of these up in my town." I'm like, first of all, if you go to Chinatown, are you going to open up an Italian restaurant? You're in Wyoming. You serve whatever y'all got. What y'all got, beef? You make roast beef sandwiches. You don't come bring shrimp in there. Half of y'all probably wouldn't eat a shrimp if your name was Shrimp. You know, the adventurous person that came down to New Orleans on their vacation, they'll try things because they're adventurous, but most of the people do not want that. But I always tell them—to get back to the story—find a Vietnamese baker. If you can find a Vietnamese baker in your area, you tell him what you want and he's traditionally—. Most of them are traditionally French-taught. They will bake you a piece of bread that you can make a real nice sandwich on. It might not be three feet long because they don't have that kind of oven, but all you need is a twelve-inch piece of bread. You don't need a three-foot piece of bread. Just they have two ends on instead of—cut. It can be done, I believe.

[01:00:02]

**SR:** Where do you get your bread?

[01:00:05]

**MM:** Leidenheimer. I use Leidenheimer. Leidenheimer's been baking bread since the 1800s, the shrimp company's been processing shrimp since the 1800s, and my payment method's been used since 1776. [*Laughs*]

[01:00:23]

**SR:** What's your payment method?

[01:00:24]

**MM:** 1776. Cash only.

[01:00:27]

**SR:** I bet people give you a hard time about that too.

[01:00:31]

**MM:** Yeah, but the reason why I make sandwiches is because I don't know how to do all that computer stuff. If I was a computer programmer or something like that I wouldn't be here.

[01:00:40]

**SR:** How do you keep a tally of how many sandwiches you do?

[01:00:44]

**MM:** I just know how much bread I make and how many sandwiches I get out of each piece of bread, so that's how I know how many sandwiches I make. Plus I got records. If you're cash-only, you better keep really good records. And that's one thing I do like, is I like to know where I stand every minute of the day financially. I like the numbers. I like numbers.

[01:01:07]

**SR:** How many sandwiches do you get out of a [loaf] of bread?

[01:01:10]

**MM:** Three larges and four smalls.

[01:01:13]

**SR:** What kind of mayo do you use?

[01:01:16]

**MM:** Mayo is—. I'm really, really picky about mayo. I use Sysco's mayo. If I can't, like if I get mad at Sysco and I run them out—which happens. If they bring me my order late, they're

not going to bring me no more orders for quite a while. I'll go find—. It's Pocahontas mayo. Pocahontas mayo is a nice, creamy mayo. I don't even know who makes it. People like—. [*Laughs*] I kind of made a fool out of myself recently with the Blue Plate people. They came in here, and I didn't know the guy owned Blue Plate. So they wanted to know why I don't use Blue Plate. It's local. And I'm like, "Local? Excuse me? When I pass the Blue Plate factory, it says 'Artist Lofts.'" I'm like, "The artists are making mayo now? That's what they're doing in there? Is that like Keebler? Y'all got little elves up in there making mayo? You don't make mayo in New Orleans anymore, my friend." I'm like, "It's not local. It's made somewhere else." I didn't know I was talking to the owner. I probably should have never said it.

[01:02:22]

But I grew up on Blue Plate mayo. Everybody from New Orleans grew up on Blue Plate mayo. My sister has my mama ship her Blue Plate mayo. And I'm like—. It's a little sweeter. It's sweeter than I've grown accustomed to. I love Sysco mayo. I don't know—. I eat mayo, I like mayo, [*Laughs*] I'm very picky about mayo, but I will find Pocahontas.

[01:02:50]

**SR:** Okay. That's pretty fascinating. I like your mayo. I'm not a mayo—. I couldn't break it down like that, though.

[01:02:57]

MM: No, you got to love mayo, because mayo holds the sandwich together. Mayo's the glue. People think it's easier to make a sandwich without mayo: "Oh, I just want it plain." I'm like, "This is the most miserable sandwich to make in the world," a plain sandwich. Everything falls off. You got to really put it in there. And, you know, people don't realize how hard I press those sandwiches in that paper when I wrap them. You can't just set it in there. It's like, when I

teach somebody, you know, how to make a sandwich—. I will teach people how to make a sandwich and, you know, I make them make their own sandwiches, [the people] that work for me. And I'll put their hand underneath my hand, and when they feel how hard I'm squeezing they're like, "Are you serious? You squeeze those sandwiches that hard?" I'm like, "Yeah, every one of them." It's like you put pressure to get it all to stay together or it kind of falls apart, and there's nothing worse than biting a sandwich and having everything just shoot out the back of it. [*Laughs*] That's terrible. I can't stand that. So, no. Mayo is the glue.

[01:04:04]

**SR:** So do you wrap sandwiches even that people eat here?

[01:04:08]

**MM:** Every sandwich gets wrapped. The original paper plate, that's what I tell them. We don't have a dishwasher, none of that. It's the tablecloth, it's the paper plate, it's everything all in one, and it holds it together. It holds it nice and warm. It's how po-boys are supposed to be. And I guess I could get some plates. I'll give them—. If they're sharing, which has been the new thing now—people love to share their sandwiches, and I don't mind that. Now, when you want to have it dressed one half this way, one half this way, I'm like, "You're not sharing a sandwich; you're having two sandwiches for the price of one at my expense," and that kind of ticks me a little bit, but I'll do it if I'm not crazy slammed. You know, if I just have a few people in here I'll do that, but if I'm crazy slammed I'm like, "No, two smalls." You get two smalls. It makes it easier for me. I can make two smalls faster than I can make a half a sandwich.

[01:05:02]

I had a lady call us up. They ordered a half hamburger, half hot sausage. I know the sandwich because I was like, "This is two people sharing a sandwich." So I specifically made it a

little longer than normal because I know they're working ladies and they work with old people and I know them, and I know what they were doing. It just so happened that a little piece of the hamburger—. I cut it, and I knew when I cut it I had that little piece on the other half, and I'm like, "Eh. So what? They're sharing it anyway." I made it bigger for them to start off with. She calls us up, cursing us out. I mean this old lady used language that I couldn't believe, swore she would never come back.

[01:05:48]

She came in the other day. Lela was waiting on her, and she never knew none of this happened, so Lela opened her plate up for her because I always tell them, "Open the plate up when somebody has a plate lunch. Open it up so they can see it." Not only do they see it; the person behind them sees it and they're like—. It's a commercial, a basic commercial. When they first open that, when you show them that big plateful packed with shrimp and fish and—. She had shrimp, fish, and fries. So she's like, "I want to check it, because my last sandwich was wrong." Well her and I started, right then and there. I'm like, "Your sandwich was not wrong." [She said,] "I had the wrong sandwich." I'm like, "I made that sandwich." I said, "You talking about that hamburger and that hot sausage?" I said, "There was a little piece of hot sausage?" We went round for round and I said, "And you don't have to curse us like that. That's crazy cursing, cursing this little young boy out because I made your sandwich wrong. You should have called and cursed me out." So she started cursing me out. [*Laughs*] She caught up where she left off.

[01:06:50]

So, I try to stay away from that. But I'll give them a plate if they want, and, you know, they end up—. It works better on a piece of paper. The stuff that does fall off, you want it, you know. You don't want it to fall on the table.

[01:07:05]

**SR:** Has she been back again?

[01:07:08]

**MM:** No, no. She hasn't been back yet. Not yet.

[01:07:12]

**SR:** Since you mentioned it, will you talk about your plate lunches, because I haven't really asked you about that. Do you just have one plate lunch a day or—?

[01:07:19]

**MM:** One plate lunch a day. We do red beans on Monday, Tuesday is grilled pork chops —or, we do breaded pork chops now. That's a killer sandwich, breaded pork chop sandwich. To me, it's a good sandwich.

[01:07:34]

**SR:** Boneless or bone-in?

[01:07:37]

**MM:** Boneless. Now we do the pork chop sandwich; we've always done the pork chop sandwich—. It amazes me how people don't want you to cut the bones off of a pork chop sandwich. I always, when they're leaving, I'm like, "I'd love to watch you eat that sandwich. Why don't you eat that here so I can see how you manipulate this bread with this bone and all of this?"

[00:07:57]

But we do the pork chops, creamed potatoes, green peas, salad. And we do spaghetti with meatballs and salad on Wednesday. Thursday is grilled chicken, dirty rice, corn. And Friday is fried seafood with your choice of two out of three. We do jambalaya, green beans, and potato

salad, and you get two of the three. But it's a two-person meal. Everything's—. I'm French, Italian, and Greek. There's no small food. People are like, "This is six inches?" I'm like, "Well, we give you a little lagniappe." Now, I've never seen—but people get mad if I make a six-inch sandwich eight inches, which I usually pretty much do. They get like, "This is too much. I can't eat this. I would have never ordered the small." I'm like, "Well, you know, throw it away, man. You're not going to help the hungry people by carrying that in your pocket all day long. Just throw it away. Don't worry about it." They don't. They eat it. They want to just make a scene, I guess, or something.

[01:08:54]

**SR:** Are you telling me that you cut the bone off to-order when you make the pork chop? You can get it with the bone on?

[01:09:01]

**MM:** Yeah, but—. I normally cut it off, but the old-timers: "Don't cut that bone off." Now what I do is I throw the bones in the plate, in the wrapper. I cut it all off the bone and I'll throw the bones in and wrap it all up. That way if they want to eat their bones, which a lot of people like to eat their bones on a pork chop—. [*Laughs*] I have to admit that I don't do that—but I throw them in there so they have their bones. But after this long, there's no meat left on those bones. I cut them. I've been doing it—. [*Laughs*] It's pretty surgically done.

[01:09:37]

**SR:** And you must sell out of your plate lunches because they don't carry over to—. You just have one a day, so you make as much as you know you're going to sell.

[01:09:44]

**MM:** Yeah, I make enough to sell out. I don't—. Nothing else to do with it.

[01:09:49]

**SR:** It's pretty classic New Orleans. Did you grow up eating red beans on Monday and spaghetti on Wednesday?

[01:09:55]

**MM:** No, spaghetti on Sundays at my house, but red beans every Monday. It's just what you have. You know the story about washing the clothes and stuff? They would wash their clothes on Monday, and the beans take all day to cook because you got to simmer them on a low fire for a long period of time, and they don't take a lot of tending to so they could just put it on, deal with their clothes, and have a nice hot meal for their family. So it's traditional; you got to have that. Some people have—you know, you can go to—. I've seen all these po-boy shops evolve, and they're evolving into now they sell red beans every day; they sell gumbo, they sell this, they sell that. I'm old-school, strictly traditionally old-school. I'm not cooking red beans on a Wednesday, I don't care how much money I can make. Life ain't all about money. Life's about me being happy and doing what I like to do and doing what I want to do. That's why I work for myself.

[01:10:59]

**SR:** Do you cook red beans like your mama did?

[01:11:01]

**MM:** Better. [*Laughs*] I cook good red beans. But you know I've been—. I put a ham base in my red beans, and I've been out of ham base. I lost two customers. Two of my red bean customers, I've lost them, because the ham base, the company that makes it, ran out. Or, I can't get it. I got it ordered; I'm waiting for it to come in. I normally put ham base in there, so now that it's been out I had to go to ham hocks, so I pack it full of ham hocks and pickle meat. See,

my mama used to put sausage in hers. I don't like the grease of the sausage in my red beans. I don't like that greasy film in it, so that's why I say mine are better. I got sausage on the side, but I don't put it in. So now I'm doing it with the ham hocks. It's good because you get the little flakes of the ham up in there and it really breaks down and the pickle meat gives you a little ham flavor there too. But I can't wait for my base to come back. I still will always use the ham hocks.

[01:12:09]

**SR:** You're saying that you lost customers because they could tell that something was different about the beans?

[01:12:13]

**MM:** Something was different. It's like Popeye's beans. Popeye's beans are unbelievable, but they got that ham flavor. They use ham fat. That's why they're so creamy; it's all ham fat up in there. That's what somebody told me anyway, a little bird. But I haven't seen them in two weeks and—we'll see. [*Laughs*]

[01:12:34]

**SR:** Can you just—? There will be people who are listening to this or reading this who don't know what pickle meat is. Can you address that?

[01:12:43]

**MM:** I don't know really know what pickle meat is either. [*Laughs*] It's a pork product, and I guess they must do it kind of like what I do with the Canadian bacon. They must brine it in some pickling solution. It's expensive as holy hell, man. It's like seven dollars a pound for—not even a whole pound. I think they're doing twelve ounces. It's kind of crazy.

[01:13:09]

**SR:** Old-school New Orleanians put that in their red beans.

[01:13:13]

**MM:** Yeah, that's old school, pickle meat. You can't even find it anywhere else, I don't think. I don't know any other cities that sell pickle meat.

[01:13:24]

**SR:** I was living in Philadelphia a little bit after Hurricane Katrina and tried to find it and couldn't find it anywhere.

[01:13:31]

**MM:** Nowhere, huh? No, that's kind of—. You know, after Katrina, everybody got a whole look at how great we had things. Because when you got out there and realized what the food scene is in the rest of the country, it's not as good as it is here.

[01:13:47]

**SR:** I couldn't find fresh shrimp either.

[01:13:49]

MM: No, but, you know, you could find some IQFs. When we go to Denver, to Lela's family, we cook shrimp for them all the time. We have a big meal we cook for them and I can find shrimp. But some things [*Laughs*] you just can't find, like the pickle meat. Nah, you're not finding that. You can find ham hocks. There are smoked ham hocks, usually, places. But—.

[01:14:13]

**SR:** Can you tell me—I'm switching gears here—can you tell me about the paint job you got a few years ago?

[01:14:21]

**MM:** Yeah. They probably would be mad at me. I had a customer who owns a building right around here, and I'm not going to use any names because they really didn't want me to ever

say it, but they would look at the building and she was like, "It's a shame. That man works so hard in that building and the building's falling apart. It's a shame, it's a shame, it's a shame." So all of a sudden I hear some people in the alleyway and I go outside, I'm looking, and they're measuring out my building. I'm like, "What are y'all doing? I never hired anybody, that's for sure. I can't afford to have somebody fixing my building." They're like, "No, no. This is a gift. The lady said that she wanted your building to be pretty and good for you." So they did my whole building, but they asked me not to say their name, so I would rather not.
[01:15:14]

But that changed the whole landscape of this business, when that happened. It changed it from being a funky little place. I mean it's always been busy, always been busy. We've always—. Guy had a tremendous business. I got a good business. It's always been busy, but it was known as a little funky place, and it had rickety tables. The tables were rocky, they were these octagon round tables and they'd been screwed a million times. I just took it like it was a funky little place, you know, and funky was cool back then. But now funky isn't so cool anymore and it just so happened that I got all prepped up [*Laughs*] at the right time. I got a nice pretty paint job. All the boards were fixed, everything, and it worked out. Maybe she did it to uplift the neighborhood, I don't know. It worked because ever since then things have been better.
[01:16:15]

**SR:** Well the inside is different too. Was that because of that paint job?
[01:16:19]

**MM:** No, that was due to the fire. We had a fire. We had a refrigerator caught on fire and it—. Smoke. It was mostly smoke damage. The smoke just tore—. I had the drop ceiling, and when I came in I was like, okay, this is how this is going to go: I'm never going to get the

insurance money because I never, ever, ever look at—. I don't never get those kind of things. Every time people get money, I ain't never get it. Law settlements, BP, this, that, I never get none of that. I sign up.

[01:16:55]

Quick story off of the subject: I sat out for a low-interest loan at twelve percent. I sat out a week. Tenneco blew up in Chalmette. Everybody got money but me because I was sitting out. They were like, "Were you home at the time?" I'm like, "No, I was sitting in front of a Homestead." [*Laughs*] So I didn't get the money, and I figured I'm never going to get this insurance money. So, being in the construction business prior to this, I know how to do it all so I'm like, "I'm just going to do it myself." So once they said, "Okay, you can go to work on it," I just started going to work on it. Well I tore the ceiling down first because it was falling. The smoke, it stunk, and it's like, "Wow, there's three feet more ceiling up here." So I opened it up and it's just cooler. It's much cooler now. It used to be hot and muggy, and now, with all this, I put the ceiling fans in and redid all the inside.

[01:18:02]

**SR:** What year was that?

[01:18:04]

**MM:** I don't know. [*Laughs*] I don't remember. It's been a while.

[01:18:08]

**SR:** But post-Katrina, right? Like in the past—?

[01:18:11]

**MM:** Yeah. It was after Katrina, because I felt guilty. Everybody lost everything; I lost nothing. I had just moved in this house I'm living at right on—. I say I live in Jefferson, but it's

like twelve minutes from here. It takes me twelve minutes to get home. I just hit Magazine Street to the river and I'm home. I'm right on the other side, right by Ochsner Hospital, right there, the parish line, the highest part of the city. I'm on the ridge. Everything I got is on high—. I'm all on the river, close to the river, just three blocks. My house is half a block. So I lost nothing, and I felt so guilty. I'm like, "God, I feel so bad. I feel so bad." And God delivered. He's like, "Okay, you feel bad? Got a fire for you. [*Laughs*] Here you go." So I guess I got my wish. [*Laughs*] It wasn't what I wished but, you know, you just make the best out of everything. That's how I do. I make the best out of what I got, and I had a chance to close down, clean it all up, do the inside—the outside was already prettied up—do the inside. It probably needs it again, actually, but maybe the next person. I'm almost to a million. [*Laughs*]

[01:19:27]

**SR:** Well, I didn't do the math, but how many years until you're sixty-two?

[01:19:31]

**MM:** Well, let's see. I'll be fifty-seven in a month, so five more years.

[01:19:36]

**SR:** When the—. Well, first of all, was the fire at night?

[01:19:42]

**MM:** The fire happened right when I left out of here. I left out of here and my neighbor was in the backyard and saw smoke coming out the side of the building and he called the fire department immediately. They knew exactly the layout of the building because they ate here, so they were like, "Guy's! What?" Got over here; put it out before any extensive damage was done other than smoke, and it was luck. It was lucky he was in his backyard because if he had been in the front yard it probably would have—. It was hot. The clock on the wall was melted. The

plastic was just melted, that's how hot it was. I didn't know that the dust in the air that you don't see but is there, it ignites, and that's how you get the big [*Sound effect*]. But it was right to that point, the guy said. He was like, "Hey, if we would have got here five minutes later, your place would be on the ground right now."

[01:20:44]

**SR:** I'm glad that didn't happen. Did you get the insurance money?

[01:20:47]

**MM:** Yeah, I did. [*Laughs*] I got paid. I got lucky, but I got to do it myself so it was all good.

[01:20:54]

**SR:** What about when the neighbor gifted you that paint job? You were not offended; you were grateful.

[01:21:01]

**MM:** Oh, no, I would never be offended at somebody giving me something nice. This is one thing I learned a long, long time ago: when somebody gives you something, you don't have to tell them a story. Because I'm a big talker, and during Katrina I had gone to Texas with all my family because we had to leave anyway. I had no electricity and nothing. Even though I had a good house to stay in, it had no electricity. So I went with my family up to Texas and, being a worker, I was unloading eighteen-wheelers full of beds for people. And every time they had something to do, I wasn't looking to get; I was looking to do. Because I was just bored to death. I had a pickup truck and people were giving furniture to somebody, and they'd say, "Could you pick it up?" I'd be like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

[01:21:45]

So these people read who I was. My little nephew was talking to them and he told them, you know, what we had and what I did, and they must have Googled me or something. I don't know how they found out, but they were like, "We want you to open up here. We have funding available for you, we have all this available for you; we want you to open up here." And I went into the story, "Thank you so much, thank you so much. Oh, but I have to go back. I can't stay here. Listen to this accent: it's not Texas. It's strictly New Orleans." [*Laughs*] So she's like, "You know, you don't ever have to tell somebody a story. If somebody gives you something, all you're required to say is 'thank you,' and, if you really truly mean it, that's it. You accept it, you say thank you, bottom of your heart, and that's it. They'll say, 'you're welcome,' or they'll just not, but that's all you're required to do. You don't have to go past that." So what I did was I said, "Thank you," gave them a big hug, and we—. We were always cool, though. I was always really nice with them. They've been always really nice to me.

[01:23:05]

**SR:** That's a good story. That's a good lesson.

[01:23:08]

**MM:** Just say thank you. You're required to say thank you, though. I mean that's one thing you are required to say. [*Laughs*] Somebody gives you something, you're required to say thank you or don't take it. But it you take it, "Thank you." I mean you got to come out with that.

[01:23:22]

**SR:** How soon after Katrina did you reopen?

[01:23:25]

**MM:** Well, I got back and had no workers. I got back—I don't know exactly how long. It wasn't—. It was right after. I was one of the first people back because I had to get permission to

come in, and the weirdest thing happened. I don't know if everybody understands hurricanes, but the pressure dropped and it sucked the grease out—. I had two deep fryers back then. The deep fryers were empty but the grease was all over everything in here. I guess the pressure just [*Sound effect*] sucked all the air out of the building. I know no fairy came in here [*Laughs*] and threw that grease all over everything. Nobody painted that grease on the wall. It was a natural phenomenon. But it was covered in grease. My house was still cool. Nothing happened there at all, so I would just come here every day and scrub, scrub, scrub.

[01:24:30]

So I scrubbed it all up and I was sitting here, all ready to go. No employees. There was no employees to have. [*Laughs*] So the girl I just walked past and I waved to—you saw me wave? That was the girl that lives next door, two doors down, and her mom was like, "What are you doing, just sitting out here?" I'm like, "Well, I'm really all dressed up with no place to go. I'm ready to open but I have no employees." So she said, "Oh, I got you an employee." So she went and got her daughter. She's like, "Wendy, go help Marvin at the po-boy shop." So she came and she helped me and we got—. I'm like, "You really going to do this?" She's like, "Yeah. I'll help you until I get back to work." So she started helping me, and then she got one of those high-paying Katrina jobs shortly after that, but by that time people were coming back in, and then I got Lela to work for me and she's still—. I'm working for her now. [*Laughs*]

[01:25:34]

**SR:** You were dating and you got her to work for you, or the other way around?

[01:25:38]

**MM:** Other way around. She came to work and then we've just been together ever since, really.

[01:25:45]

**SR:** It's kind of a Katrina story a little bit.

[01:25:47]

**MM:** Yeah, a little bit of a Katrina story. It is. It was weird back then. It was different. [*This portion of the interview has been omitted.*].

**SR:** Were you busy right away?

[01:26:05]

**MM:** Extremely busy. Extremely busy. I learned how to speak Spanish. [*Says a few words in Spanish*] We were totally packed, as fast as we could make sandwiches. I stripped the menu down to just shrimp, fish, hot sausage, hamburgers, ham, turkey, and roast beef. That was the menu, that was it, and we just pumped sandwiches out of here all day long.

[01:26:38]

**SR:** That might have shaved a year off of your quota.

[01:26:42]

**MM:** Oh, you trying to get me out of here early, huh? All right, I like the way you're thinking, Sara.

[01:26:47]

**SR:** No. I know how hard you work, but I'm not looking forward to the day that I can't get a po-boy at Guy's, I can tell you that. What about, did BP affect your business at all, the [Deepwater Horizon] oil spill five years ago?

[01:26:59]

**MM:** Yeah. The oil spill affected my business more than anything else because I sell shrimp. That's my main sandwich. That's what I promote, that's what I endorse, and people were

deathly afraid to eat Gulf seafood. They still are. Some people are still afraid of it. I'm kind of like, I haven't died yet, you know. Nobody else is dying from that, so.

[01:27:26]

**SR:** Did you have a problem getting shrimp, or was it just the psychological thing?

[01:27:31]

**MM:** Getting them was a problem. Getting them and the psychological part. When we were able to get them, then nobody wanted them. It was strange. I was kind of really worried that that was the end of my deal, you know. Like, my gig's up. And for a while I was really thinking, like, what else am I going to do? Turn it into a straight deli and stay away from the seafood? I guess it wore off by now, but there is some people that still, to this day—. I was just in New York and they were talking about it, like, "Oh, y'all still eating them oily shrimp?" I'm like, "No. I don't see any."

[01:28:13]

**SR:** I've taken up a lot of your time. I'm going to just ask a couple more questions. My first one is—. I mean you answered a lot of the questions I had written down just in the course of conversation, which is great. Have you ever been involved with the Po-Boy Festival?

[01:28:29]

**MM:** I was there for the original meeting. I was there for the original meeting. They had a bunch of po-boy shops, they all got together, and they said that—. It was when Subway was making a big push. Subway was making a big push in the city, they were opening up Subways around everybody's po-boy shop, and everybody was nervous. And they were like, "They're killing us with the advertising! They're killing us with the prices! They're killing us with this! Let's have a po-boy festival to promote po-boys." So I'm like, "Okay. Let's do that." Then I'm

like, "I'm all in." So we talked further and talked further and then they decide that—. I guess the gist of the whole thing from the beginning was to make money. They wanted to make an infusion of money on themselves at this festival, and I was not for that. I was like, if we're going to fight Subway, let's all work for free. We'll do everything we can; we all have a lot of buying power. Between twelve, fourteen restaurants, we have a lot of buying power. We can get donated food. We'll get a lot donated, we'll buy, and we'll put all the money in the pot and we won't even collect the money. We'll have a token booth, they'll collect all the money, and we'll buy ads on television to combat their ads. If you really want to fight them, you know, what's one day of money going to do for you? You're going to spend it. Whereas if you put it in an ad, you could make money every day off of that.

[01:30:03]

They didn't see it my way. They wanted to do it—. I'm like if I'm going to open up on a Sunday I'll come here and open up. I'm not going to go pay to open up. I'll just open up here. I have a place; I have a business; I have a building. It's got electricity, refrigerators; I'm not going to haul all my stuff out. I'm not a clown circus. I'm not on the road. So, I pulled out, and they came back a while back and asked me to do it again and I'm like, nah. I don't do what I don't want to do. But I still think my idea was the best idea. Subway has pretty much kind of come and gone, but—.

[01:30:39]

SR: Yeah, I remember—. I was at one of the meetings—not one where you were—and it did sort of feel like a threat at that point. And the other sandwich shops—. Now, I don't really feel that anymore. Do you?

[01:30:57]

**MM:** No. It's not a threat anymore. It really has come and gone. I'm not—

[01:31:04]

**SR:** Do you—?

[01:31:04]

**MM:** —going to talk bad about Subway. [*Laughs*] But it's not a threat like it was. Po-boys are on the rise now. Maybe because of their festival. I don't know.

[01:31:15]

**SR:** Yeah, I don't know either. Are you familiar—? Did you ever come into contact with this historian, Michael Mizell-Nelson?

[01:31:21]

**MM:** No. Never have.

[01:31:24]

SR: That's okay. He was kind of a po-boy historian and he passed away in the past year, so I'm asking people I interview about that just in case they knew him. All right, one last question, which is: What would you say is your favorite part of the work that you do and the occupation you've chosen, and the most challenging part?

[01:31:48]

**MM:** My favorite part's the people. I love the people. I love to talk to people. I just—. I like it. That's my favorite part. The most challenging part is hiring people. I only need two. I only need two good people. You would think there's two good people out there, but I've been through a lot of people. I have two good people right now, and both of them are leaving me at the end of the month. It's kind of, oh. So I got two weeks to find two good people. Any people out there want a job?

[01:32:25]

That's the most challenging part. But I'm pretty—. I'm an insane worker. You're not going to come here and think that I'm the boss, by no stretch of the imagination. You'll think somebody owns this place somewhere else because I'm washing dishes, I'm mopping floors. I do everything. I'll take garbage out. I won't never tell somebody to do something; they'll just see me do it and realize that, "It's probably a good idea for me to help him, since he pays me and he's kind of out there picking up all the paper and I'm sitting in here having a cup of coffee." Good idea. I'll be like, "Hey, good idea. You came and helped." But you've seen me work. I'm fast. Very, very fast.

[01:33:11]

**SR:** And I have to say, I feel self-conscious talking to you when I come in here. I don't really want to because you're working so hard, but now I know that that's the favorite part of your job. [*Laughs*] I'll do it more often.

[01:33:23]

**MM:** It's my favorite part. It makes everybody—. I'll be talking to somebody and I'll see somebody in the corner over there looking at the conversation and I'll bring them in. I'll be like, "Where you from?" It's amazing how many people I serve from all over the world. Like just today, the people from Australia came here, right? They're going to come back tomorrow. London, some—oh, what did the guy tell me? Nova Scotia. Some little island off Nova Scotia, some prince name. I don't know. But people come from all over the world. I get to talk to people from all over the world, so don't make me mad. I'll tell everybody. No. [*Laughs*] That's what I like.

[01:34:16]

**SR:** Is there anything you can think of that you'd like to say that I haven't asked?

[01:34:22]

**MM:** Anything—? No. We pretty much talked about—. I could keep talking. [*Laughs*] I don't really have any signoff.

[01:34:33]

**SR:** That's okay. I just thought of two really anticlimactic questions that I didn't ask. One is: What kind of oil do you use for your frying?

[01:34:42]

**MM:** I use soybean oil. Soybean oil is what I use. We grow soybeans in Louisiana, soybean is—. Less soy allergies than peanut allergies. I constantly get all day long, peanut allergies, you know, people, "Do you use peanut oil? Do you use peanut oil?" And I'm like, "No, don't, nowhere in here. No peanuts nowhere." And it's clean. I don't keep it long. I mean I use fresh oil every day, so it's like I'm going to use it up. I don't need it to be a high tolerant oil; I just need it for a day.

[01:35:29]

**SR:** The other thing is: I've been staring at these pralines the whole time we've been talking. [*Laughs*] Who makes your pralines?

[01:35:38]

**MM:** Lela. Lela makes the pralines. She's the praline queen. Have you ever tried one?

[01:35:48]

**SR:** Yeah, and I think I'm going to have to do it again.

[01:35:50]

**MM:** Yeah. Like I said, she's a vegan, so for her to be making these pralines—. There's no meat in them, so I guess it's cool, but she uses the best. We use the best.

[01:36:04]

**SR:** Are they vegan?

[01:36:05]

**MM:** No, they got cream in them. [*Laughs*] No almond milk. Don't even tell her about—. Don't even put that in her mind, about using almond milk instead of the cream. [*Laughs*]

[01:36:15]

**SR:** I will not. They're very good.

[01:36:18]

**MM:** Please. [*Laughs*]

[01:36:19]

**SR:** And then one last thing: Who's your horse?

[01:36:23]

**MM:** The horse. We were working one Saturday during Mardi Gras. My little nephew was working. I'll always have family members working. My sister worked with me in the very beginning. She worked with me for years. After I finally—you know, after the people transitioned out of—. Uncle Joe, who was here, he got old and his wife was sick so he had to quit working. Frank got tired of working in this business and went to work for another friend of ours. Everybody kind of moved on, so my sister came to work with me. And then my little nephew came to work with me, and then a family friend worked with me for—. I usually start them at sixteen. Cody I started at day one because I could. It was legal. I could make him work. [*Laughs*]

But the rest of them, they usually always start at sixteen and work with me until they get ready to get out of college, go in their regular jobs.

[01:37:20]

I was bringing him—. He wanted to go meet his friends that Saturday before Mardi Gras, so I took Tchoupitoulas [Street] and I knew I could shoot up to Julia [Street] and get him close to the area. They were in the 700 block of St. Charles. So a guy was walking—well, walking pushing a grocery basket, with this horse in the basket, and he had a couple other little odds and ends. So, I was sitting in traffic and I'm like, "Hey, man, where you going with that horse?" He said, "You want to buy the horse?" He was like, "Twenty-five dollars." I said, "All right, man, twenty-five dollars." He says, "Hey, for a cigarette, I'll put it in the back of your truck for you right now." I said, "Well, I don't have a cigarette, but I got twenty-five dollars." He says, "Okay." So he put it in the back of my truck, I gave him the twenty-five dollars, and I've been having it ever since. People ask me about the horse and I tell them it's a worldwide chess game. Right now the knight is here.

[01:38:28]

**SR:** That is very random.

[01:38:31]

**MM:** Yeah. Now, a Hubig Pie man told me he had one just like it, my Hubig Pie man. And then Hubig Pie burned down and I never seen him no more and I never got the other horse. He said it wasn't on a pedestal, though. Like see how that one's on a pedestal? He just had the head. You don't know how many people want to buy the horse. One guy was upset that I wouldn't [sell it]. "I'll give you plenty money for the horse." I'm like, "Man, the horse ain't for sale."

[01:38:56]

**SR:** It's like your mascot.

[01:38:57]

**MM:** Yeah. I tell them it's the last horse I ever bet on. [*Laughs*]

[01:39:02]

**SR:** All right. Well, thank you for giving me all this time. It was really a pleasure to get this much of your story.

[01:39:09]

**MM:** Thank you for having me.

[01:39:14]

END OF INTERVIEW