Trey Monaghan
Molly's at the Market — New Orleans, LA
* * *
Date: April 16, 2015
Location: Junction, 3021 St. Claude Avenue, New Orleans, LA
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Transcription: Lori Lawton
Length: One hour
Project: French Quarter Cocktails

START INTERVIEW

[*Transcript begins at* 0:01]

Rien Fertel: Alright, this is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is April the 16th, Thursday afternoon, 2015 just after 3:30 in the afternoon. I'm here with Trey Monaghan at his bar Junction on St. Claude Avenue, and I'm going to have him introduce himself. We're going to talk about his family, his family's long involvement in the French Quarter and many, many French Quarter bars over many decades.

[0:00:32]

Trey Monaghan: Hi. My name is Trey Monaghan spelled M-o-n-a-g-h-a-n. My birthday is 4/02/82, April 2, 1982, and I feel like there was one other thing you wanted me to say.

RF: No, that's good. Well, tell me what you call yourself when you introduce yourself to new people in New Orleans or elsewhere.

[0:00:53]

TM: I call myself Trey Monaghan.

RF: Well no, "I am a …" Do you call yourself a bar owner?

[0:01:01]

TM: Yeah, I call myself a bar owner and operator, bar manager sometimes depending if my father is standing really close to me, depending on the day. He asks me what bars I own, but I am a restaurant owner here in the city. Occasionally, now my sister, who is very smart, was like,

"You call yourself a publican. That's an actual thing." And I was like, "Oh man! That sounds so cool!"

RF: What is a publican? What does that mean?

[0:01:29]

TM: A publican is somebody that runs bars.

RF: It's like an old-timey word?

[0:01:33]

TM: A very old-timey word. But I was like, "Oh man, I love that! I should use that." And then I got in front of city council and I was like, "Man, I forgot to say 'publican'!" And she reminded me of it, so it was like that's a great word, so maybe I'll just say I'm a publican from here on out.

RF: I love "publican." I'm going to start using that. To refer to you all, who was the first publican in your family?

[0:01:52]

TM: That would be my grandfather, Jim Monaghan, Sr. He came into the city in early '70s [1970s] and he actually didn't start as a publican, he started as a pastry chef and pastry owner. I guess it's not called a "pastry owner," it's called a "bakery owner," and it was called Monaghan's Patio Royal. It was over on Royal Street where Royal Blend Café is now.

RF: I was just reading about the family. I did not read that. I don't know if people know that, or if that's been discussed. Was he a trained pastry chef or baker? What is that story?

[0:02:34]

TM: He wasn't. He came to New Orleans, fell in love with the city, got married, had some kids, got divorced, found a new wife, became a door-to-door welding salesman. He was selling welding equipment to people, industrial equipment, and then decided one day they had saved enough money and they moved to New Orleans with a few thousand dollars and he decided at that point he was going to be a pastry chef and a bakery owner.

RF: Really?

[0:03:01]

TM: Yeah.

RF: Where was he moving from? Where was he born and where was he living?

[0:03:07]

TM: Okay. He moved — at that point he had moved from Chicago to New Orleans, but before that, he was born and raised in Zanesville, Ohio, joined the Air Force, and then lived in a couple of different states before moving to Chicago and finding his then third wife, that he came here with.

RF: His third wife he met in Chicago and came here with. Okay. One more question about the pastry business. Did he cook at home? What was the interest there? Do you remember eating his —? Did he keep cooking pastries after he got into the bar scene?

[0:03:40]

TM: No, not at all. He got into the bar scene and started drinking, and I don't remember him ever cooking a single meal for me ever in my entire life.

RF: Was the pastry business successful or did he close it because of the bar? Did it fail? How long did it last?

[0:03:55]

TM: It didn't last very long. Actually it wasn't very successful. It's part of the family history that's kind of fun to watch my grandpa shape and mold his persona, because you see him in certain interviews early on talk about how the bakery business is really tough, you wake up really early, it's really a hard job. And I credit everyone that works in the bakery business because of how hard both he and my step-grandmother told me how hard it was, but later on in his life, he started to talk about how— he just got out of that business because the clientele sucked. He didn't like dealing with rich white women early in the morning. So it was one of those things like the real truth is: not successful as a bakery owner. Later in life when he could say whatever he wanted, that's how he would describe why he got out of the business.

RF: Okay, so kind of creating his own myth in a way.

[0:04:50]

TM: Yeah, absolutely, 100 percent creating his own myth.

RF: So when did he open his first bar? Tell me that story. Where was it?

[0:04:59]

TM: That first bar is Molly's on Toulouse. It's at, I want to say, it's 726 or 730 Toulouse Street. We don't own it any longer and we've never owned it since I've been alive. But that started in '74. Last year marked the fortieth anniversary of Molly's, so that's when he got into that business, and he started it as the bakery was failing. They opened Molly's on Toulouse as their last-ditch effort in New Orleans.

RF: How old was he around that time in '74 [1974]?

[0:05:34]

TM: He died in 2001. When he died in 2001, he was sixty-three, so add three years to that and he would have been what, sixty-six, subtract whatever that is, forty years.

RF: Thirty years.

[0:05:53]

TM: Thirty years, yeah, so he would have been in his mid-thirties.

RF: Yeah, mid-thirties. Did his wife support the bar?

[0:06:03]

TM: Yes, absolutely. She worked in the bar, helped financially support the bar. She brought her money. She was a teacher before she came here and when she left here, after they got divorced, she went back to teaching. But yeah, she worked every position in the bars that they owned. She bartended, she cooked, she waited tables, she cleaned, she did everything. I feel like every bar owner I've ever met can tell you they've done it all.

RF: Was her name Molly? Where did the name "Molly" come from?

[0:06:33]

TM: No, her name was actually Carol — is Carol. She's still very much alive. She lives in Hawaii and back in Kansas City, between the two places now. "Molly" comes from across the street what is now 733 Toulouse, there was a guy there that was actually owning and operating a bar and when my family started their bar, as their last-ditch effort, this guy came across the street and told him that it was going to fail. And they didn't know anything about the bar business, they didn't know how hard the bar business was, and the guy said, "You might as well just give it to me now because you're going to give it to me at some point." So Carol and my grandfather, they were like, "Let's name the bar 'Molly,' then if we do have to sell it to him, he'll want to buy it for more because we named it after his dog. And if it's successful, then there will always be that bar across the street from his bar named after his dog, because he was such a jerk, that we named the bar after his dog and he doesn't own that bar."

RF: So it was to spite this jerk.

[0:07:41]

TM: "Molly" is not a woman. It is named after a dog specifically out of spite and also the possibility of might having to turn around and sell this place.

RF: So even though the famous logo — I've been going to Molly's since right around when I turned twenty-one, I guess, when I moved to the city. There's a famous logo and it's of a woman, that's just made up or that represents someone?

[0:08:08]

TM: That is just made up. That is just made up. That is an artistic version of — I don't even know who made that logo honestly, but that is their interpretation of who Molly would be.

RF: Okay. So it sounds like your grandfather had a sense of humor.

[0:08:24]

TM: Yeah, big time. Both he and Carol have a sense of humor. Humor is something that's very much inside of my family. I actually did professional career for eight years as a comedian. I was at Second City. Love comedy. I think there's only one way to get through life and that's laughing.

RF: Your grandfather passed away. How do you remember him when you remember him? Maybe describe how it looked or how he dressed or how he talked, his voice. Was he a smoker? What did he drink? Tell me just kind of those little things that people might remember about him.

[0:09:03]

TM: He was big. When I finally started to remember my grandfather, his health had already started to fail quite a bit, but one thing everyone remembers is how much he drank Tab Cola, which is such a weird thing and there are all these stories about him constantly asking for Tabs and people bringing him the check at the table and never wanting to be embarrassed, so they were constantly picking up meals and everything because were like, "Didn't even know there was a cola called Tab." The very first memory I have of my grandfather is going to a dinner with he, my dad, my mom, and my sister, this is in Colorado. My mom lives in Colorado and my

sister and I grew up splitting our time. And going to this dinner and I just remember this larger than life figure that was just — I don't think that I have ever met someone that was so old and so confident and he had jewelry on, which is like something that my father never wore, so it was just seeing this guy — he had a diamond ring on. That was the point where I was like, "I'm a dude, I can like diamonds! Yeah! That's awesome!" Yeah, he just had this larger than life character that he had built for himself and once I got a little bit older than that, I started to realize that there were so many more layers, but that was really like the first memory and I would feel like, when people talk about my grandfather, that's really the Jim that they all know as well.

RF: So was he a lovable person? Did he have lots of friends? Did he have a big community around him, a big circle?

[0:10:46]

TM: He had tons and tons of friends. These guys that we refer to as "the window crew," that were like his inner most crew of guys and girls, they would all hang out on the weekends at Molly's, sit in the window, drink, laugh, talk. Some of these guys would travel with him. One of the guy's name is Joe Walker. They took a cross-country road trip. They hired a car driver, sat in the back of a Lincoln Town Car, and drove around the country. That was actually — that's the dinner, Joe Walker was at that dinner as well. The driver was in the car, sitting. Here's this guy that's from New Orleans who has driven to Colorado to have dinner with his grandkids while he's just driving all over the place. Tons and tons of friends. His funeral, people flew in from out of town for his funeral which was something that was really kind of shocking to me. I mean there were shuttles going back and forth to the airport to pick so many people up. It was really kind of crazy to see that he had impacted that many people. I always had some idea from our parades

that we put on and lots of people being there, but his funeral really was this thing where it was like holy smokes, people from out of the country sending flowers. It was intense.

RF: You mentioned the parade. He started his own parade or several parades, right?

[0:12:11]

TM: Yeah, he actually started multiple parades. He had started with the Downtown Irish. And there was a falling out. I don't know what the falling out was over, but it was severe enough where my grandfather was like, "This will be my last year with the Downtown Irish." By the following year, he had started his own Jim Monaghan's Decatur Street Irish Club, and they fired off and now the parade is in its — this was its thirty-third year this year.

RF: Describe the parade. What happens? Is it on Saint Patrick's Day? Is it over the weekend?

[0:12:45]

TM: Well, there's so many parades for Saint Patrick's Day in New Orleans that the city has made us all reach an agreement on how we can parade, because you can't have them all on Saint Patrick's Day. There's just not enough resources to do them all at the same time or anything like that. So what we have agreed upon is to march the Friday before Saint Patrick's, unless Saint Patrick's is on Friday, then we march on the same day as the Downtown Irish. But the Downtown Irish is the oldest club, so they get to march on Saint Patrick's, and the Irish Channel march on the Saturday before Saint Patrick's.

RF: In his lifetime, would he lead the parade? Was he the master of ceremonies?

[0:13:27]

TM: Yeah, he would always sit in a carriage up front and the parade is really kind of crazy because the Saint Patrick's Day parade actually starts with a limo bar hop in the morning. And so everyone meets at Molly's at eight o'clock in the morning and everyone starts drinking. All the men are dressed in tux's and women are in fine gowns, and then ten or fifteen limos roll up out front, police escort and we do a bar hop with a police escort out of these limos which is the craziest experience because you have people standing on the side of the roads as you're ripping down the streets and they're waving at you because they have no idea if you're a motorcade for a president or an ambassador. They're literally just standing there and waving and can't see anyone, and you step out and you've got fifty to 100 wasted drunk people with green beads on and they're like, "Awe, I was waving at that? What?" And then by the nighttime though, it rolls back to Molly's and it's horse-drawn carriages or mule-drawn carriages. Another great friendship my grandfather had with Mr. Charbonnet, Louis Charbonnet, who owns Mid-City Carriages, and so Mid-City Carriages rolls up with all of their carriages, everyone jumps on and then we throw beads throughout the whole French Quarter and come back to Molly's by about ten o'clock. So it's eight in the morning until ten o'clock at night. It's a long day of drinking. It's fun.

RF: And he started the Halloween parade in the Quarter also?

[0:14:44]

TM: He did, yeah. There's the Krewe of Boo that started recently in the last five or ten years I think it has come in to play, which is the Kern's parade. It's great.

RF: Kern being the old Mardi Gras guy who does tons of floats and stuff?

[0:14:59]

TM: Yeah, absolutely, and so that parade is really new, but our Halloween parade he started twenty-some odd years ago and it's, I would say a much more adult parade than the Kern's family parade.

RF: You said he drank Tab. What was his alcoholic beverage of choice? Did he drink spirits? Did he drink beer or wine?

[0:15:24]

TM: To be honest with you, when he died I was eighteen or nineteen years old, and he had already suffered several heart attacks, but I was taught that you don't turn down a drink, so I know my grandfather would drink anything that would get put in front of him. If someone was like, "I'm buying two beers. I've got one for you," he'd have a beer. And he'd definitely would drink his spirits — I know that he liked rum, big time rum.

RF: Did he consider himself Irish? How much did he identify with his Irish ancestry? Did he do the pilgrimage back to the motherland? Did he trace his roots back?

[0:16:11]

TM: I wouldn't call it necessarily a "pilgrimage," but he did go to Ireland several times. Some of our closest family friends live in Ireland. Guys that actually he met in New Orleans convinced him to go back. Obviously his last name is Monaghan, so we're from Ireland. But some of our closest family friends are in Belfast and Northern Ireland, and so he went to Northern Ireland a bunch of times. The Belfast Circus is there, and he was great friends with those guys.

RF: So there's several hundred bars in the French Quarter, in terms of location. Your grandfather had owned, at one point or another, many of those locations. Do you know how many — we can't go bar by bar, but kind of a short history of his chronicles of bar owning?

[0:17:04]

TM: Man.

RF: The figure I just read was he owned thirty bars at one time in his life, thirty different locations, different bars in the French Quarter.

[0:17:15]

TM: Through the course of his life, that number sounds very much like the number that is talked about in my family, but Molly's was the first. I mean there's so many. What's now the Erin Rose used to be Monaghan's. Erin Rose before that, it was Candice's on Conti. There's so many of these bars that I don't even know about. Bonaparte's Retreat, Macho Mike's, Easy Eddie's. Easy Eddie's is like this cool, little speakeasy that they set up. It was right next door to Pres[ervation] Hall actually, and all the musicians in town could get a member card so that they could come in and be members of this club that they had set up. And that's like one of the ones where it was it just like, man, just so many ideas that he had that I never even realized because by the time I came about, there weren't nearly as many of those, but then you've got Katie's Underground, which was outside of the French Quarter. Burgundy Street Outback. There's thirty bars. I'm never going to think of them all. But the progression would be, there in the mid-'80s, mid to late '80s, is really when it was thriving and jumping like acquiring, buying, doing what he was doing as far as — I think at one point he was operating thirteen all at one time.

RF: Would the general theme of the bars be Irish bars? Would they be just kind of laid back drinking bars? Did he ever have a kitschy Bourbon Street-type bar, did he ever have a bar on Bourbon Street with the plastic drinks? Did he ever try to capitalize on a Hurricane-type drinks or a Hand Grenade-type drinks? Did he ever go that route?

[0:19:14]

TM: He didn't really ever go the — I mean we do have a "kitschy" drink, if you will. I don't think it's kitschy. I think it's delicious which is the Frozen Irish Coffee.

RF: Which we'll talk about, but it's a lot different.

[0:19:30]

TM: It's so different than that, but that is like a signature drink that he would pride himself on as being "This is my signature drink." But outside of that, no. He did have a location that was on Toulouse and Bourbon, which is now a Tropical Isle.

RF: I talked to Tropical Isle and they did mention that. Well, let's talk about his drink, the signature drink at Molly's at the Market. Tell me about it. Tell me the name, maybe how far its roots go and what it is.

[0:20:04]

TM: It's Jim Monaghan's Frozen Irish Coffee, Monaghan's Frozen Irish Coffee is the other way I've heard of it referred to. Now I've also referred to it as the Erin Rose Irish Coffee, which is always kind of funny to me, because it's like that's somebody that probably doesn't know the history there. It would be way better to be drinking that right now than these beers because it's really warm up here. I'm really sorry about this.

RF: No, I'm alright. Are you alright?

[0:20:27]

TM: Yeah, I'm great. I'm great. I actually have to work in these conditions sometimes, but I was assuming that you'd be figuring we'd be sitting in a cool bar and not a construction site. That being said, the Frozen Irish Coffee came about — I don't know what year it came about. A lot of these questions I wish I could get you to talk to my father about, but the Frozen Irish Coffee is just this amazing dairy frozen deliciousness that has whiskies and brandies and coffee liqueurs, and it's perfect for warm/hot summers.

RF: It also tastes really good in the winter for some reason. I don't know. I drink them every season, every month here in New Orleans.

[0:21:16]

TM: I'll tell you, my absolutely favorite thing to do with them, because I've had so many of them that they kind of don't taste the same, so it's fun to find different ways to make them do something new. A Guinness float is the best. Pour like a half a cup of Frozen Irish Coffee in the pint glass, Guinness on top and awe, delicious! Delicious!

RF: So eventually your grandfather moves the bar from Molly's on Toulouse to Molly's at the Market, it's called now. When about does that happen and tell me about that location. I think you know that location really well and you actually live there.

[0:21:55]

TM: Yeah, I actually live in the apartment that my grandpa lived in until the end of his life there at Molly's at the Market. Molly's on Toulouse is actually still there, but we sold that

location. My grandfather and Carol sold that location. They turned it into a successful bar despite what the guy across the street thought was going to happen.

RF: What happened to him? Do you know? He's not there I'm guessing.

[0:22:15]

TM: What's interesting is we actually own the building.

RF: Where his bar used to be?

[0:22:21]

TM: Absolutely, yeah. That's a building that we own.

RF: Did he remove him from the building? Do you know if that was—?

[0:22:29]

TM: I don't know exactly how that went down, but I can't imagine it was too pretty, and my family has a way of gloating when we're winning, so I can't imagine he was too thrilled when that happened. So we sold Molly's on Toulouse, and Carol and my grandfather took that money and turned around and bought the building that is 1107 Decatur Street, which is where Molly's at the Market is. So it's funny because we have these conversations in my family. My dad, when I've outside of the city, I've worked for a few franchise places, House of Blues and those types of things, so my dad is always — not franchises, but chains and he always like, "You're going to create a chain with Molly's." I was like, "No, grandpa already did. He created two Molly's. The very second thing he opened was another Molly's." But yeah, that place opened in the last '70s and unfortunately it actually burned to the ground.

RF: Molly's at the Market burned?

[0:23:29]

TM: Molly's at the Market. There's a great picture if you're in Molly's, it's kind of hard to figure out what you're looking at because it's a dark photograph, but when you see it and you actually look at it now, you'll recognize that it's a building on fire and there's fire trucks putting it out. The top three floors of Molly's burnt, and that happened in the early '80s. The bar has a great reputation not being closed, didn't close during Katrina, and burned to the rafters of Molly's. They put tarps over it in the mornings and kept the bar open while they did the whole remodel and everything. So that location, I guess, to answer your question, has been there since the late '70s [1970], '78 [1978] — '77 [1977], '78 [1978].

RF: When was the fire?

[0:24:14]

TM: Just a couple years after that, it was '79 [1979], '80 [1980], right in there.

RF: So it's called "The Market" because it's across the street from the French Market, almost in the French Market. It's on Decatur Street. Have you heard any stories about early Decatur? I live on Decatur, the last block of Decatur in the Marigny, so I'm very interested in Decatur. The stories that I've heard about when your grandfather opened that bar in the '80s that Decatur was "skid rowish," it was like almost the outskirts of the Quarter, it wasn't the nicest place to be, and he kind of planted his flag there. Is there truth to that? Have you heard stories about that? Did he have a stake in revitalizing that part of the Quarter?

[0:24:56]

TM: A hundred percent true. It's funny because you talk about the "early days" of Decatur and these guys that are here in New Orleans that are legends and they'll tell you about the early, early days of Decatur when it was still very much an Italian neighborhood, and thriving and the market was a whole different thing. And then it really did fall off, '50s, '60s and '70s, and turned into a place that you didn't want to necessarily go. When you say "skid rowish," it's an accurate portrayal. My grandfather used to talk about how there would be people with barrels with fires in them during the winter when he opened Molly's, which is like a crazy thing to envision in the French Quarter or anywhere. Our major complaint now is we have a guy sleeping on the sidewalk or the music is too loud, and it's like literally burn barrels set up in the middle of the French Quarter. And he did, he went down there and I guess because that neighborhood was that way, it's how a guy like my grandfather, who came to the city with not a lot of cash, could turn around, sell a business, because he didn't own that bar, Molly's on Toulouse, he didn't own that building, so he just sold the business and took that money. To be able to buy a building you've got to sometimes go someplace where not everyone else wants to go.

RF: I want to ask about a few details. I've spent a lot of nights at Molly's. I want to ask about a few details that I've always wondered or maybe if you have some stories about them. So one of the most famous structural details of Molly's is the window in front. It has a window like right on the sidewalk and, if it's available, people want those two or three seats or whatever stools. Did he build that in there? Was that already there? Are there any window stories? Is there a name for the window? Tell me about the window.

[0:26:49]

TM: Everyone I've ever heard just calls it "the Molly's window," "sitting in the window of Molly's." I guess we should come up with some name that would be fun, but that is just the matching doors — when you look at all the buildings in the French Quarter, there is the matching double doors on almost all of the buildings on the ground floor, and Molly's had that. And instead of being able to have people come in and out of those doors like so many places do down here, he decided that he wanted to have someplace to sit there, and so he just built a bar top to fit into the door jam. So it's just a regular set of doors that open up and then we place a bar in it every morning.

RF: Is that where he would sit?

[0:27:34]

TM: That was his favorite spot to sit.

RF: So it's like the best people watching in the entire city, if not like the country. It's amazing that you can sit there for hours and hours.

[0:27:44]

TM: Yeah. I would say if you can get the inside seat, facing the jukebox, in the front door to Molly's, it is the best seat in Molly's because you can see the whole length of the bar. You can see everyone walking into the bar. You can see everyone walking back and forth on Decatur Street and you're not losing anything because your back is to a wall. So you literally have no fear of missing anything.

RF: Okay, so a couple other things at Molly's. In Molly's at the Market, there's all these signs hanging from the ceiling, from the rafters. Tell me about those.

[0:28:21]

TM: A lot of those signs are bars that my grandfather started, some of them successfully, unsuccessfully, I guess, would be how they winded up. Bonaparte's Retreat is one of my absolute favorite signs. It sits in the very middle of the bar and you can see the level of detail. It is a hand-carved wood sign that has — I guess it's not a life-size replica of Napoleon on it, but it is a very tall Napoleon on this sign and it's fantastic. Other businesses that have been around and then gone out of business, there's like the Kaldi's Coffee sign that sits above the Frozen Irish Coffee machine, which I think is a cool little nod there, especially because on the Kaldi's coffee sign it says, "And Coffee Museum," which I don't remember Kaldi's at all, but that is one of those things that is like, "Cool, this thing that is dedicated to coffee is right above this other thing that's all about coffee." There's a Storyville sign that's in there, which I love, because that place used to be where Ellen DeGeneres used to do comedy, was at The Storyville Comedy Club, and so that sign is hanging up right as you go back towards the bathrooms. If you look up, it's right there. Back by the photo booth there is another sign, which I think is the coolest sign. Bonaparte's is awesome, but the coolest sign is the Monaghan's Patio Royal sign, because it's the original. It's the very first sign.

RF: That's the bakery sign. Oh, I didn't know that. Alright.

[0:30:03]

TM: Yeah, it's the bakery sign, and some people know the history of it. Not a lot of people know the history, but when you see it and you know the history, it's like, "That's that place," like, "that's why he came here was for that."

RF: Alright, one last detail on that bar that I love is there is there's a mural in the back of the bar by the bathrooms. Can you tell me about that? I guess to describe it, it's a bunch of faces. Who are those people? What's the story of that mural?

[0:30:35]

TM: Okay, that mural was painted by a guy named Mark Marino, and that project started, I want to say early 2000. And all of those people that are on the wall are people that were near and dear to my grandfather, and some of the people on the wall are very famous, John Goodman, who happened to be a friend of my grandfather. And Ed Bradley is also on that wall. But there are so many people that are on that wall that — I've never met Ed Bradley. I have met John Goodman, he's a pretty cool dude. But there are so many people on that wall that have so many amazing stories. Joe Walker, the guy that I told you drove around with my grandfather, he was a pollster, so he has all these great Louisiana politic stories, or did. And before he died, that was the thing that he wanted because he would walk back through that area which is now the back bar, but before there was even a bar there is when that mural really got started and the mural has all of his friends on it. It's all of my grandfather's friends. There's images of my father, his son, his daughter Kelly. There's all these people that were close to my grandfather that he wanted to see, and so he picked out photos from his person photo collection and gave them to an artist named Mark Marino and said, "Come back here and paint this."

RF: Is that also the entrance to his apartment?

[0:32:04]

TM: If you straight through the back bar, there's a little green door there and that's the apartment door.

RF: For you personally, how is it living above a bar or in a bar almost? So Molly's is open twenty-four hours?

[0:32:17]

TM: Molly's is open twenty hours a day. It's closed from 6:00 until 10:00 am.

RF: What is that like?

TM: It's really cool. There's certain parts of it — I feel like if you live there and you don't work there, it might be even a little cooler, but like when you live there and you work there, it's like, "We know you're home. The light is on. We need you to come out and fix this problem." And you're like, "Eww." But the other aspect is that it's super cool in the fact that you have all of these awesome experiences that probably don't happen at other people's houses, where someone calls you from your living room basically and goes, "Hey, Mike Rowe is here in the bar right now and would love to meet one of you guys." And it's like, "Oh cool, I'll come out and meet Mike Rowe because that guy is awesome." Or you have these other experiences where you go out with your friends and it's the quickest trip home. You don't have to worry about designated drivers, cabs, anything. You just go, "Hey guys, why don't we all hang out at Molly's and then you guys can crash on my couch, in my bed, and it will all be good."

RF: How do you feel about that? I grew up in a restaurant family and I remember it was like, "Hey, let's just go to the restaurant and get free food for dinner." Is that problematic sometimes? "Let's just: bar tab."

[0:33:44]

TM: Occasionally it can get a little like, "Hey, wow, you're pretty drunk." I've been thrown out of Molly's which is an interesting experience.

RF: Out of your own bar?

[0:33:57]

TM: Yeah, where they go: "Hey, you know what? Clothes are not optional for you. If you're going to be naked, you need to go home." It's like, "Are you really throwing me out?" And they're like, "Yeah, we're really throwing you out. It's not that bad because you have clothes in your house, so just go home, put your clothes on and sleep this off!" So that's not bad. It does get rowdy though sometimes.

RF: Do you remember your first time in that bar or your first time you had a drink at that bar? Do you have an early memory of that bar?

[0:34:28]

TM: I do have a first time memory of a drink in that bar because I had done everything in my power to not — I had this ideal vision in my head of what my first drink would look like. It would be having a drink with my father and my grandfather on my twenty-first birthday in my family's bar, so I didn't drink at all in high school. I was like the weirdo kid. They were like,

"Your family owns a bar. You're supposed to be like this party kid!" I was like, "No, I'm not doing it. I'm not doing it."

RF: Did you go to high school here or in Colorado?

[0:34:57]

TM: I went to high school in Colorado. But then you have your friends here and they're like, "Come on, just have a drink. It's all good" and it's like, "Nah, I'm going to wait. I'm going to hold this out — or hold out I should say." What's nuts is my grandfather dies in 2001, which is two years before my twenty-first birthday and I was like, "You know what? That sucks." And so my first drink in Molly's was actually the night of his funeral.

RF: Really? Okay. And there must have been a big party, a big celebration for his life.

[0:35:28]

TM: There was a huge party. I don't want to say it was the largest jazz funeral that I've ever seen, but it was easily the largest jazz funeral I've ever seen in my entire life. It was incredibly beautiful, incredibly sad. One of the small history things about Molly's is that it was a Marine bar at a point in the '80s; it was a big time Marine bar when the base was thriving here. And so my grandfather, like I said, he was in the Air Force. We couldn't find his discharge papers from the Air Force, so we couldn't do the military salute to my grandfather, but the Marines heard about this and they were like, "No, that's not right. This guy was military. This guy had our bar." And the Marines actually did the whole folding of the flag and everything and presenting it to my fourth grandma, Liz, his widow.

RF: So your grandmother was his second wife?

[0:36:30]

TM: My grandmother was his first wife.

RF: His first wife, okay. And what was her name?

[0:36:34]

TM: Her name is Sandy.

RF: Sandy. So tell me about — did your father take over the bar at some point or take over the bars at some point?

[0:36:41]

TM: He did. He moved back before my grandfather died. That's why I say the split there between the time with my father and my mother.

RF: In Colorado?

[0:36:52]

TM: Yeah. He moved from Colorado to New Orleans, was working with my grandfather up until the time my grandfather died. When my grandfather died, he took over Molly's and a few other corporations that he had set up with Carol, which was basically companies that we own properties with. And when my grandfather died, he willed a bar — he willed Erin Rose to Troy, Troy Koehler, who is just our last grand marshal for Saint Patrick's Day. He was working with my grandfather as well, like his right-hand man.

RF: He ran the bars?

[0:37:33]

TM: Yes, he ran the bars, and so when my grandfather died his gift to Troy was a bar.

RF: Wow. What was your father doing before he moved to take over the bars and the property?

[0:37:46]

TM: He was a master electrician.

RF: Oh, okay. Does he still run the bars? Do you run the bars? How has it worked since 2001? You were young at that point.

[0:37:57]

TM: In 2001, I started learning how to be a manager of the bars, which is a crazy experience because you're learning to manage these places and you can't really even be in them. So it was a very different experience. You're going into them when they're closed and it's a really kind of weird thing there. I hate that question honestly: "Do you run the bars now?" because it's that question from *Casino*, where they ask De Niro and De Niro is sitting behind the desk, he clearly is running the casino and then he gets in so much trouble for saying he runs the casino. Everything I answer that question with a "yes," I get in trouble. So I politely say, "No, I work for my father."

RF: Someone owns something. Well tell me this, it sounds like at some point in your life you didn't want to manage a bar. You said you moved to Second City, so in Chicago and you did standup there for a while. What was that like? What was that about? Did you want to leave the city? Was it post-Katrina? Was it pre-Katrina?

[0:39:15]

TM: It was pre-Katrina. Actually Katrina, when Katrina happened, it was the start of me wanting to come back to New Orleans. But my father, just like my grandfather, very strong personality, very strong-willed, I have the exact same disease, you put two of us in the same room, especially a young, dumb kid that's twenty-one, twenty-two years old that thinks he's got the whole world figured out. It's like, "Awe, I can run these places." It's like, "You don't even know what day the taxes are due!" I was like, [yelling] "You don't understand me! I'm out of here! I'm going to be great in comedy!" And then Katrina happened and I was actually doing comedy and living in Las Vegas at the time and I was like, "Man, I've got to get back." And I came back to New Orleans almost immediately after the storm. My family kept Molly's open. What's crazy is Molly's had a working phone behind the bar, and so I was calling and getting all these reports and I was like, "I've got to get on a plane and get back there." When I came back I was like, "Man, this is where I need to be." Then more of that whole father-son push and pull happened and I was like, "I should probably go audition for Second City," because that sounds way less stressful than fighting with your father every day. So I went and auditioned for Second City, got in, loved it, and then again it was like, "I still really missed New Orleans." I missed being around New Orleans. Even when I was doing comedy, comedy doesn't pay huge amounts of money, so you're working in restaurants, you're working in bars, like I said earlier, House of Blues, I worked for a sushi company in Chicago. It was one of those things like, "Man, I've got to get back. I just have to go back."

RF: So when did you come back finally?

[0:41:00]

TM: I came back in 2009, early 2009.

RF: Okay. So I was living here for Katrina and I remember — evacuated and then came back — and I remember one of the first things I did when I came back was go to Molly's because it felt safe. It wasn't deep in the Quarter, easy to park around that time. Did it ever close? Did the National Guard ever shut it down and send people away, like I know they did to some other all night places?

[0:41:34]

TM: No. I mean when we say that we stayed open, we didn't do anything that we thought would put anyone in danger. We didn't want to — obviously you've been hanging out at Molly's a long time. A lot of the people that hang out at Molly's are first responders, police officers, firemen, military, all these people that were in New Orleans helping. Here we are — and this is the kind of bar that we run, so we don't want to run a place that's going to put their lives in jeopardy, because we're keeping patrons in the bar until three o'clock in the morning. So when there was a curfew in place, Molly's abided by the curfews. Even still, when there's a hurricane bearing down on the storm, if there's a curfew in effect, Molly's plays by the curfew laws, just because there's no need to put other people's lives in danger, but we're not going to not open. That was the thing.

RF: You mentioned that the people who were hanging out at the bar at that time, I think Molly's is famous for other groups of people hanging out at the bar and that is kind of politicos, so that's both the politicians and the people that hang around politicians that work for them and

interview them and talk about them, and also news people, media people of all types. Can you tell me the history of that and if that still goes on?

[0:42:46]

TM: We still do media night.

RF: What is media night there?

[0:42:49]

TM: Media night is on Thursday night. We try to get a bunch of people to come in. My grandfather loved the media, absolutely loved it. He was a wizard at being able to, like I said earlier, craft his story and really sell himself there. But then he loved just being around really smart people. We are so fortunate; there are people that come into Molly's on a weekly basis, there's multiple Pulitzer winners that come in, guys like Mark Schleifstein that are in the bar every Thursday night from media night, even when there's no media bartender. That was like the thing, like at the time, my grandfather's widow, Liz, she is Liz Scott and she writes under a pen name Modine Gunch for *New Orleans Magazine*, but she was also running the journalism department at Loyola as well. And so media night is happening, my grandfather's friends with all of these people, meets Liz, starts having people bartend that are members of the media, people that like to be on camera. I'm one of them. I like to be behind a bar. It feels great when you're back there. It's like, "Wow, everyone is looking at me." Certain people don't like that. Some people really do love that and pretty much everyone I've met that's a reporter, especially like a TV anchor, loves it and so that's how that really came about. It still happens that way. And then where there's reporters, politicians follow, because politicians need to have their message get out. So then you have members of the local government that are coming in and bartending and

state-wide government even, multiple times. One of my favorite pictures in the bar is of Edwin Edwards on the front of *The New York Times* bartending at Molly's at the Market, which is an awesome picture.

RF: When politicians or media get behind the bar, do they keep their tips or do they give it to the bartenders?

[0:44:48]

TM: I have not heard of any of them keeping their tips, but our bartenders are really good at keeping their mouth shut. I think that's one of the better traits of a great bartender is you just don't ever say anything. If a customer really upsets you, you're just like, "Whatever, on to the next one." So I assume that that's probably happened, but I've never heard of that happening.

RF: Is there one bartender that sticks out in your mind as iconic for that bar, that has been there a long time, that people associate with the bar?

[0:45:20]

TM: I feel like generations have their bartenders. It's like I talk about media nights and Thursday nights and I know so many people who associate that with Laura and Laura. And you talk about — man, there's just like so many. I'm running through my head. Right now there's Tara that works back there on the weekend nights and she's got this gorgeous black hair and amazing artwork for tattoos and she's got this just dynamic personality, and she worked there during the storm as well. She's been around for a really long time. People recognize her. That's the last ten years. We're coming up on the ten year anniversary, and she's been behind the bar for ten years at Molly's. That's an incredible period of time to be there, but, like I said, everyone

has their own generation. At a certain point, people are just like, "We're out of here." Or my father has gone, "You're fired!" Or I've said, "You're fired!" Or they've gone, "Eff you! We quit!" And then they go someplace else and have amazing careers too.

RF: So just this past year you opened your own bar. We're sitting here now, upstairs. Tell me about it. Was it a trajectory that you saw coming for a while? Was it something that you were pushed by your family? Did your family say, "No, don't do this"? What was that like?

[0:46:43]

TM: Well we should probably clear this up right now. This is actually a bar that is two-thirds my family, one-third not my family.

RF: Okay, so it's a partnership.

[0:46:52]

TM: It's a partnership and it was one of those things where we had opened right after 13 opened. That's the last place that we had opened before this place, 13 on Frenchman Street. And 13 opened 2004, so right before the year of Katrina, which is an interesting time to open a place, and It's on Frenchman. And Frenchman didn't have nearly the reputation at the time that Frenchman has now. The street has completely changed. You hear people talk about it as "baby Bourbon" now, and eleven years ago when we bought the building and the restaurant that was there, people went, "It's never going to make it. It's too far away from the Quarter." We were like, "It can't be too far away from the Quarter. It's a block away from the Quarter. It's not that far." I think people find it, and people have been finding other successful businesses down here for a while now. Spotted Cat was already there, Blue Nile was down there. (Why can't I think of

the name of the jazz club?) Bicycle Michaels had been down there forever. It's just one of those things where you're like, "Come on! This is going to work!" And now it's massively successful on Frenchman, for so many people. So this happens and we don't open another place since 13, so it's eleven years we've gone. And we start to see what's going on on St. Claude. My father is very much into fishing, being outdoors, and I'm very much young and wanting to do something, and so I keep pestering my father that we need to do something. And then everyone else in my family starts pestering my father that we need to do something, and then he goes, "You know what? We need to do something." And we're like, "What are we going to do?" He, my father Jim, he goes, "I like St. Claude. Let's go down to St. Claude, you know?" And you go to St. Claude and Elysian Fields and it's a very easy, smart choice.

RF: What did he like about St. Claude? People who now invest and hang out on St. Claude are people our age.

[0:48:57]

TM: Yeah.

RF: Was it a tough sell?

[0:49:01]

TM: No, when we actually came to this place where we are now, Junction, it was a convenience mart. This really nice Vietnamese couple owned the place, and my dad came up here and there were just these old time guys having some drinks in front of the convenience store, sitting on "their stoop" having their drinks. And my father just started having these great conversations with them. He was like, "Man, you know what? I want to open something over

here where we can hang out with these guys, hear these stories, drink some beers." And I was like, "That sounds great! Let's do that!" So we put the ball in motion, we bought this place, and turned it into a beer bar.

RF: How has it been?

[0:49:47]

TM: We opened in December. It's great. The burgers that we serve here, all the beef comes from my family's farm which is up in St. Amant, which is a cool little farm to table aspect of it, but we didn't open it with the idea of being a burger restaurant. We opened it — there's forty beers on draft, a bunch in bottles, so we opened it as being a beer bar that just happened to have really tasty burgers, and right now I feel like everyone knows about the burgers and then they come and go, "Man, you've got a lot of beers on tap." And it's like, "Wow, fought really hard to make this." We went to City Hall, we got the cocktail license. We wanted this to be a bar first. Right now I think everyone's perception is that it's a restaurant. I'm just happy people are coming in and having great experiences, honestly. If you come in and you just want to have a beer or a glass of water, great, come in. I want you to be here because the beef is fantastic. I see the cattle every weekend. If you want to come in though and just have some beers, that's great. We've got a courtyard we're working on, a patio that we're working on right now. Hopefully we can get that up and going sometime in the next year so that we can just start selling some pitchers of beer and having people sit out in the courtyard and drinking.

RF: Just one or two more questions. Your father, compared to your grandfather, do they have the same personality? Does your father spend a lot of time in the bars? Is he into the parades? Like father like son?

[0:51:14]

TM: I would say yes and no. I think in a lot of ways they are very similar and then in huge ways they're massively different. I would say that I got the performer side of grandfather that would skip a generation or the self-promoter side of my family fell to me, or skipped my father, because my father is not about taking credit. My father works incredibly hard, incredibly smart, sees things that other people don't see in the same way that my grandfather did. Frenchman Street, prime example of that. I remember walking down Frenchman Street going, "Eh." We had the opportunity to buy the location where Blue Nile was and Blue Nile actually went through several people's hands from when we bought 13, or bought what was Old Dog New Trick. I would say they share vision and intelligence, massively equal on those things, if not a little more, especially on the books. My father is a diligent reader and the smartest guy I know, honestly.

RF: What do you mean a reader? What books? Do you mean the finance books or books, books?

[0:52:33]

TM: Books, books. All books.

RF: What does he like to read? That's interesting.

[0:52:36]

TM: There's nothing that he won't read. If you tell him this is a good book, he will stay up all night reading it. They also share that, we all share that in my family, my sister, myself, my father, my grandfather, we all find a way to not sleep well which probably doesn't bode well for

any of our health. Like I said, my grandfather died at sixty-three. That's pretty young. So we should probably all sleep a little bit more, but my father likes to stay up and read, my sister is the same way, I'm kind of the same way. But my father is huge into — I don't want to call it "book smarts" because he's a "street smarts" guy too, so it's one of those — when I say he's the smartest guy I've ever met, I mean it.

RF: Is your sister involved in the businesses?

[0:53:22]

TM: Yeah, my sister works side by side with myself, my dad, my stepmom Alana. We all work in the family business. Like I said, I hate the "Casino question" of "Do you run these bars?" I could say yes, but so could my sister, so could my father, so could my stepmom. We all do. It's a family effort.

RF: Last question. Who goes to Molly's today? How would you describe the clientele, the regulars, and what accounts for the bar's popularity? What do you think gives the bar its spirit? Why do people go there? There are any one of hundreds of other bars in New Orleans where you can also get a pint and you can't get an Irish Coffee everywhere, but I think there's something else there.

[0:54:14]

TM: I think there's a lot of small variables that make Molly's what it is. You said it, as far as when you came back from Katrina, it's kind of a little easier to park on that side of the Quarter. One of the things I constantly hear people complain about is the lighting. It's so bright in Molly's. Everyone will say, "It's so bright. It's the brightest bar on the block. It's the brightest

bar in the lower Decatur. It's the brightest bar in the lower French Quarter." And I say that that actually is something that helps, because it makes it easy as a meeting place. I know plenty of people that will meet their friends in a dark, dingy bar and have no problems with that. I'm one of those people. I have no problem. I'll walk into Tiki's anytime to meet someone I know who's sitting down there, but it makes it easy. You can look into Molly's and you can be like, "Oh, I see such and such sitting over there. I'm going to go over and say hey to Sam." And you walk over and you're having a conversation with Sam because you can see from the street all the way to the back of the bar through that giant window, through the giant doors and it makes it where it's inviting, you know? It's not so dark or where you've got somebody that might be lurking in the back on a couch or something like that where it's like, "Hey, I can see everybody! That's a comforting feeling to start my night or it's a comforting feeling to end my night on too."

RF: I never thought about that, but it's true. All the other bars on the street are very dark. So who hangs out there? What is the clientele like, generationally? Who is it?

[0:55:47]

TM: Oh man, it shifts and that's one of my favorite aspects about Molly's is that it shifts, because you've got the guys that come in at ten o'clock in the morning and they'll have their Irish coffee, the coffee and Bailey's, they'll just be sitting there drinking, reading the newspaper, having these great conversations about whatever it is: how they used to work on the oil rigs and all these things. You're like, "Oh man, I didn't realize that you used to be a Navy Seal and then you became a diver and fixed oil rigs. That's a crazy life to me. You've packed so much in and now you're sitting at Molly's having these conversations." And then you start to see it roll over certain time periods where you go, "Wow," alright, it's about five o'clock, six o'clock, people

are getting off of work, it gets a little younger. Depending on what day of the week it is, you start to see people coming in getting their party on Thursday, Friday, Saturday night, ten o'clock, it's a little bit younger. Then you get all your people that come in late at night that are all industry people. And so it's just really eclectic. Like we talked about, there's police, firemen, politicians, reporters, skateboarders. This weekend there's a tribute to a guy, his name's Warren Day. He's a big time personality in the city. He's a skateboarder and he passed away really kind of tragic circumstances, but we have one of his skateboards hanging up in the bar. So we have all these skateboard guys that hang out or skaters that hang out in the bar. I mean it's just — you never know who you're going to see in Molly's and I think that's also kind of what helps with that as far as making it an inviting place where you can go in, you can have a conversation with a Navy Seal and a guy that has done nothing but been a professional skateboarder his whole life. You're like, "What? Huh? Both sitting in the window right now?" So weird.

RF: Earlier in our conversation you said that your dad said something about not franchising, but building a Molly's empire, having several Molly's. Is that possible or is Molly's a singular entity? Can it only be in one place at one time?

[0:57:59]

TM: It can only be in one place at one time. Like I said, it's his fear of what I would do with the place.

RF: Oh, it's his fear, okay, not his push.

[0:58:08]

TM: It's his fear of — it's not his push at all. It's his fear of what I would do if given full reign of Molly's. But I would challenge anyone, go to Molly's on Toulouse and then come to Molly's at the Market and tell me which one is the cooler bar. Both started by my grandfather and I'm not trying to disparage Molly's at Toulouse, but it is what it is. I mean I feel like Molly's at the Market has such a unique feeling to it. It's like you go to a bar where — it's like, "I've never seen this bar ever. I guess this place just opened." And you walk in and there's a million things on the walls and you're like, "How did you get all this crap up on the walls so quick? What? Huh? That doesn't even make sense." But you walk into Molly's and it's like everything that's on the walls, everything that's behind the bar — we have five people's ashes behind the bar at Molly's. That's like one of those things — I think that's got to classify as being the largest cemetery in the French Quarter! But it's like you can't get five people's ashes for when you open your brand new bar in the French Quarter, unless you're putting your family members up there. And that's just not the way Molly's has been built. You can't replicate something like that. It doesn't make it authentic. It doesn't make it real. You can't duplicate it. Molly's is Molly's. There will never be another Molly's.

RF: Is your grandfather's ashes behind the bar?

[0:59:34]

TM: Yes.

RF: He's one of the five.

[0:59:36]

TM: He is one of the five.

RF: And the other four were regulars?

[0:59:38]

TM: Yes, and very close family friends.

RF: Okay, this was great. This was really informative and fun, so thank you so much.

TM: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW