Judy Walker
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Annemarie Nichols: Good morning. I am Annemarie Nichols, and I am interviewing Judy Walker at her home in New Orleans. We are interviewing for the Women Food Journalists Project. It is March 14, 2018, and let's get started.

Would you introduce yourself for the record, please?

[0:00:33.1]

Judy Walker: Sure. I'm Judy Walker, and I am the retired food editor for *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, and I love being retired, but I did have a wonderful career at three newspapers. You were going to ask me about my early life. I was born Judy Trower, T-r-o-w-e-r. That's my maiden name.

[0:00:56.2]

Annemarie Nichols: Let's get started, Miss Walker, and talk a little bit about where were you born, and can you tell me about your early life, your roots?

[0:01:04.5]

Judy Walker: Sure, sure. I was born in Dallas, Texas. My dad traveled around a lot early on. My relatives are all from Oklahoma, so we moved to Oklahoma. We lived in Oklahoma in my early part of my life near all my relatives, and then we moved to Arkansas when I was in the second grade, and we lived in Arkansas and my dad ran the telephone company there for many years. We lived in a very small town, and I graduated from high school there in Perryville, Arkansas. I went to Arkansas Tech and became an English and journalism major, because I had a high school journalism teacher in my

senior year, but I'd always been like an English kid, you know, and loved to write and stuff.

[0:01:52.9] My mother was a great cook. She loved anything new and she would buy any new product. She would try any new recipe. I remember she loved when we moved to Arkansas from Oklahoma because she heard the neighbors talking about this new Karo nut pie. It was pecan pie. They just called it Karo nut pie. [Laughs] But she loved everything, and she was a social worker for a time, and so she would go into these tiny, tiny rural communities around this tiny town where we lived, and she loved meeting these people, and they would turn her on to all kinds of things. We'd pick muscadines. Anyway, it was a great place to grow up, and we had a big garden and everything.

And then after college, I moved to Tulsa, and by that time, my parents had moved back to their hometown in Oklahoma, and I worked at Tulsa Cable TV, and then I got a job at *The Tulsa World*, and I was at *The Tulsa World* as a magazine writer. I started out as a listings clerk. When I was working at Tulsa Cable, it was one of the very first cable TV stations in the whole country, and I had been programming the computer there, which was, like, *very* elementary, this *giant* thing that we had to do, and I did the listings, the event listings and all that. They also started an in-house little publication, you know, like a little *TV Guide*, but for the cable channel, and so I had written stuff for that, so I had clips when this job came open at the *Tulsa World.* So I became a listings writer and a magazine writer at *The Tulsa World*, and so I wrote some magazine stories about food at *The Tulsa World*.

So I eventually realized that I could stay in Tulsa my entire career if I wanted to, but I didn't really want to. So my boyfriend that I was dating got a job at *The Arizona*

Republic, a much larger newspaper, another morning newspaper—I've always worked for morning newspapers—and at the time when the newspaper there was expanding hugely. So, in 1980, I moved to Phoenix, and within a year had convinced them to give me a job, too, and I became a reporter in one of the bureaus in Sun City, Arizona, which was a trip. It was a retirement community outside of Phoenix, it was one of the first retirement communities, just packed with really interesting people, so I wrote all these feature stories about them. And then a job came open in the features department and I moved to the features department, and in that department eventually became the food editor. At that time, there were two newspapers, *The Arizona Republic* and *The Phoenix Gazette*, and they eventually merged. Anyway, then I moved to New Orleans with my husband in the year 2000.

[0:05:32.8]

Annemarie Nichols: I have a question. What's the difference between a morning newspaper and—

[0:05:40.1]

Judy Walker: There used to be afternoon newspapers, believe it or not. [Laughs]

[0:05:45.4]

Annemarie Nichols: Different deadlines?

[0:05:46.0]

Judy Walker: Oh, yeah, different deadlines. They came out at different times. Your morning newspaper would come out in the morning, and the afternoon newspaper, I don't know what time it ever arrived, like, in the afternoon. The idea was you'd have one to read in the morning and one when you came home after work, and most cities had them. In some cities, there would be like newspaper wars where they would try to, like, outdo each other for whatever. When I started at *The Tulsa World*, there were two newspapers, a morning and afternoon newspaper. *The Tulsa Tribune* was the afternoon newspaper, and so it eventually disappeared. I don't remember whether they had food coverage or not. Surely they did. Everybody did.

So when I got to Arizona, we had an afternoon newspaper, and there had been several afternoon newspapers here, too, in New Orleans. Dale Curry, who was my successor at *The Times-Picayune*—and she is still around, too, if you ever want to talk to her, but Dale, I think, worked for the afternoon newspaper, and then when they merged, later worked for the morning paper, *The Times-Picayune*.

[0:07:01.2]

Annemarie Nichols: Cool. I want to go back a little bit and ask you about deciding to become an English and journalism major. Can you tell me a little bit about that teacher who influenced you and why you made that decision?

[0:07:14.4]

Judy Walker: It just seemed like a way that I could make a living. My mother had thought I should be an English teacher, and so I didn't really want to teach and stand in

front of a classroom, and so it seemed like journalism would be a way that I could make a living writing and not have to be an English teacher. And I enjoyed it. I enjoyed talking to people. I didn't ever enjoy news, you know.

[0:07:40.2]

Annemarie Nichols: So I want to talk a little bit, too, about being a magazine writer and going into the features department. What's the difference between—like, what kind of content did you write for magazine writer as opposed to for features?

[0:07:55.9]

Judy Walker: Well, magazine writers typically write longer stories, you know, and back in those days, almost all newspapers produced their own magazines, had a standalone magazine that would come out on Sunday, so you had higher readership, better-quality paper. *Parade* is like the vestige of all that, but some papers would even carry *Parade* and their own magazine. Every place had their own magazine. They would have magazine writers. Sometimes they were freelancers, sometimes they were staff. The magazine editor would work very similar to what a magazine editor does today still, and they would pay a little more to their freelancers. Staff writers didn't get anything more, but sometimes they would hire, like, staff writers to do, like, travel stories and use their photos or whatever, and you'd get paid a little more. But that was the difference. You would write longer stories for the magazine, more complete, like, feature-y-type stories, and I love that.

[0:08:52.0]

Annemarie Nichols: So when you moved to feature, what were you writing first? What sort of?

[0:08:57.9]

Judy Walker: I was a general assignment features reporter in Phoenix, and that's a fun job, because you just cover everything, books coming out, authors coming through town, interesting people doing stuff in the community. And this was in the [19]80s. This was the time of the Women's Movement really coming to the forefront, and I remember covering the Year of the Woman, you know, and all that kind of stuff. We just covered all kinds of crazy things.

The Arizona State Fair was always a big deal in Arizona, so I have several favorite memories of things I wrote for the Arizona State Fair, and one of them I always talk about was the Dinner of Rocks, and this was displayed [Laughs] every year in the collections. They had a whole department of nothing but collections. You know, Arizona's got a lot of old people in it, and this couple had been rock hounds for years. You know, Arizona's also like a big rock state, and rock hounding was a big hobby back then, and this couple had collected all these rocks that looked like food, and they had cut them so that, you know, the yellow agate looked like a slice of merengue pie, and they put white calcium in a glass to look like milk and stuff like that, and they would display it on a big dinner table that they hauled around on plates and everything, the Dinner of Rocks. [Laughs] So I always love stuff like that, just really offbeat fun stuff.

[0:10:27.5]

Annemarie Nichols: Sounds fun.

[0:10:29.3]

Judy Walker: It was fun.

[0:10:30.1]

Annemarie Nichols: So how did you come to be the food editor at *The Arizona Republic*?

[0:10:36.9]

Judy Walker: There was a food editor before me who had been there for years, and she sort of had her own niche back at the paper, and she reviewed restaurants, and she had a big wall of, like, trophies she had been awarded by, like, the Pork Board and all these different in-house organizations. To me—okay, this is from the perspective of somebody who was like thirty—she represented like the really old-school type of food writer at that time. There were rumors that were later verified in my mind, in actuality, that she got deliveries of wine regularly from a wine distributor to her house, which that kind of thing is so strictly against newspaper ethics. Anyway, so when she was away or whatever, I started volunteering to fill in, and eventually they decided I would be a better person in that job.

So I immediately went to *The Phoenix Gazette* food writer and talked to her—I hadn't really known her very well before; her name was Jane Baker—and found out that

this annual gathering of food editors, which *The Arizona Republic* editor had *never* been part of this organization, they were getting ready to meet. So I got the newspaper to send me to that, and I learned a lot. Dorothy, Dotty, Griffith was head of it the first year I went.

Anyway, so that's how I got to know a lot of people, through that organization, and I belonged to it off and on for years, and it still exists. It was first called different things. It had two different names. Newspaper Food Editors and Writers Association was the first name, and then it has another name now that's more inclusive of other people writing outside newspapers.

[0:13:20.0]

Annemarie Nichols: What are some of the things that you learned when you went there that first time?

[0:13:25.4]

Judy Walker: Oh, how people handled their beats. This was all brand new to me. They would do great things like have a little—so it's always hard to come up with a different angle for the holidays, so they would have one session where everybody talked about ideas that they had had that you could adapt to your different locale, and everybody would sit there madly writing them down, and sure enough, next year there would be, like, all these stories about a different way to cook a turkey, you know.

But the meetings were always mostly specific to the location, so you could go to the location and the city that it was being held in and get a bunch of ideas and stories out

of that city, and you would write them up for the travel section and you would write them up for the food section. Whoever was the chairman of that visit, they would bring in experts on different topics from all over the country or in their region, and so you'd get a story about sustainability of seafood and things like that, all kinds of different stories that you could use in practicality. The focus was partly on education for the food writer, but also stories that you could get out of it and all that.

[0:14:50.7] Actually, when I was in Arizona, I attended the conference in Louisiana, in New Orleans, that Dale Curry chaired in 1987, and she put together this beautiful cookbook, and she has the recipes in here from everywhere [shows cookbook], from all the chefs we interviewed. We went on one of the paddleboats with Paul Prudhomme cooking for us. It was just, like, sensational. And one of the things she had done was she had a guy cook a turkey for us. She had a guy deep-fry a turkey. You better believe it. Everybody else and I went back to our newspapers and wrote about deep-frying a turkey for the first time that year, and it spread the whole idea across the whole country. It was great. It was great. Dale did a super job. And you could see from the number of tabs in this we were there a whole week. Now the meetings, I think, they're much abbreviated, but it was a great trip. We went to Cajun country, we went to the McIlhenny plantation. We did everything.

And then later, when I lived in New Orleans and I was still a member, I hosted a meeting here when I was the food editor, and the food editor in Baton Rouge, their newspaper sponsored a whole day, and we went up there and we did a cane field and sugar stuff and went to Houmas House and had dinner. And we had lunch at—I'm

spacing his name, but the other big chef who's in Donaldsonville now. I'll think of his name in a minute. But anyway, I did it later. *Huge* pain in the butt to try to do it.

[0:16:49.2]

Annemarie Nichols: I can imagine.

[0:16:50.1]

Judy Walker: It's like a big convention. But anyway, it was a lot of fun. But the one I went to that Dale had in 1987 was just amazing.

[0:16:59.2]

Annemarie Nichols: So she's responsible for the fried-turkey craze.

[0:17:02.6]

Judy Walker: Yes, yes! We wrote several stories through the years on fried turkeys, and she's got great stories about deep-frying a turkey for the first time and people burning down their porches. She's got great stories about it.

When I went back to Arizona, I hired a caterer to do it for me, because I was so frightened of all that boiling oil. [Laughs] So they looped it up with a rope just like we'd seen in New Orleans—I had the recipe—and they looped it up with a rope and they lowered it down in there, and they'd used a nylon rope, and it burned through, so here's the turkey bobbing around in the oil. [Laughs] But it worked out fine. It was a story.

We got great pictures out of it. You know, fried turkeys are pretty. So, anyway, we got great pictures out of it too.

[0:17:47.4]

Annemarie Nichols: That's great.

[0:17:50.1]

Judy Walker: Yeah, it was fun.

[0:17:52.3]

Annemarie Nichols: I want to talk a little bit about over the scope of your career and going back to college as a journalism major and you're a woman, did you face any challenges for that, like by your professors or any instructors?

[0:18:11.9]

Judy Walker: No, not really, not really. By that time, there were a lot of women in the newspaper profession. The people who were the generation before me, they were still fighting that like crazy, and it was still—by the time I was into it, in college not so much, there was still a lot of resistance among men in Tulsa and Phoenix, but not so much. It used to make me *so* mad when I would have these great stories in the Arizona paper and I'd see the publisher and he'd go, "My wife really liked your story." [Laughs] But, you know, that's the kind of stuff you get.

[0:18:55.2]

Annemarie Nichols: Can you share any more experiences that you faced that way?

[0:19:00.7]

Judy Walker: Like that? Not really. I do think they were pretty much accepted. When I worked at the cable TV place, it was more there, because that was all coming out of regular TV stations, and the people who worked behind the scenes and the cameras and stuff, they were used to it all being men, so there they were not used to seeing women there. By the time I got to newspapers, there were a ton of people working in all these departments that had been traditionally seen as women's departments. There were men and women working in them, but I had men and women editors both, so I never really had that many challenges on the job.

You know, the challenges were things like—in Arizona, oh, god, another thing was I had this editor and he had been promoted from being a writer, and his idea was basically to sit and rewrite your stories exactly like he would have written them. And so he would want to sit there and he would want you to look over his shoulder while he sat at his computer and edited your story, and he would be smoking a cigarette the whole time, so his cigarette smoke is coming up in your face while you're trying to look over his shoulder and read your story. [Laughs] So it was a whole different world, but not so much challenges. There really were a lot of women before me and a lot of women in the departments. There were a lot of women in the news departments too.

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Annemarie Nichols: I want to ask, too, what are the responsibilities of a food editor when you first started?

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Judy Walker: Oh, my gosh.

[0:20:50.4]

Annemarie Nichols: Can you talk about some of those responsibilities?

[0:20:52.2]

Judy Walker: This was one of the things that's so amazing now when I think about it. When I started in Arizona, we had a thirty-six-page food section every week, thirty-six pages, you know. Now they're lucky if any newspaper has a four-page food section or more than like one front page. I mean, some papers do, but for a state newspaper to have that much advertising, really the only places for food companies to advertise was in magazines aimed at women that had recipes, or aimed at cooks, let's say, and newspapers. That was their advertising. So my responsibility was to fill up those pages every week, so you had to come up with a lot of stuff. So I would write stories that would run on the cover, and some of them would start on the second cover, because we had to fill all three covers. It was divided into three sections, and you'd know how many inches you had to fill. So I would write a cover story. I had a column, and then we had other columnists that were freelancers, and I had to, like, edit them and get their copy ready.

[0:22:17.2] Then I would have to find wire copy off the AP—we got two different wires, and so I would have to go through them, and sometimes the newspapers would have a wire editor whose job it was to sit and sort through all that copy that came in from the Associated Press and UPI, and sometimes they would subscribe to other wires as well that existed. So the wire editor would put stuff over in a certain basket where you would look through that, and so I would get, like, the AP food writers had a regular food column, and we subscribed to certain other things. In fact, one of the women that we carried for years is still around, and she's in Atlanta now, Susan—I'll think of her name. It's a seven-day meal planner. She's like an RD, and so she would do a whole week worth of meals and recipes, and so for people who needed ideas for recipes, it was great, so we carried the seven-day menu planner for years.

We carried Pierre Franey in *The New York Times*, columnist, and we carried some of the *Chicago Tribune* food columnists. So there are syndicates that have columnists, you know, so we would subscribe to different ones, and so once a year you'd sit down with the editors and you'd go over your list of what you're subscribing with and say, "Do you want a new one? Do you want to drop one?" or whatever. So that was one of the things you did too.

We would also get reams of mail. The newspaper food editor got more mail than anybody else in the whole section, and the majority of it was press releases from the food companies, and they would provide recipes with their product and photography, which we desperately needed, right? We're filling up all these pages, so you've got to put art in them somewhere so they're not just all gray. So they would send black-and-white photos, because that's mostly what we used. Later on, they started sending slides. And

they would have recipe developers use their product and make these recipes, and you could use those. You could rewrite them. Some people would just run them flat out the way they were. We didn't. So you could use those.

[0:24:53.6] Sometimes you would even pull those kind of things in on a story you were writing if it was real—and so some of those, they kind of were ranked by ones that were more—you would get them from the—so say there's like the chicken people who—the poultry producers would pay a part of their—you know how that works, right? There would be these associations for the different foods, like the Pork Producers Council and all the different ones, Cattlemen's Beef Association, and for every product there was one. When Jane Baker left *The Phoenix Gazette*, she worked for the Michigan—the Cherries Council for a while, because she went back to Michigan where she was from. But anyway, you would get this information from them.

So that was sort of easier to use and sort of more relevant to the consumer, which was what you always judged it for, is somebody going to get something out of this, as opposed to, like, a product from General Mills, a press release from General Mills, you know. So that was the main duty, was to just fill up that section every week, and through the years, that section shrank and shrank and shrank as all these advertising venues opened up for food manufacturers. You know, at Thanksgiving, the section would be packed. And grocery ads too. The grocery ads were the main focus of advertising, so you would have an ad rep at the paper down in the advertising department, which was completely separate from news. All the different grocery chains would have a representative that would occasionally come see you and try to get you to write about

something. You'd say, "No." [Laughs] But they would at least tell you what was going on in your community.

[0:26:57.7]

Annemarie Nichols: That's nice to know.

[0:26:59.2]

Judy Walker: Yeah. And some of these recipes from the food manufacturers were so crazy. I would throw the ones that I considered kind of whatever into a file, and at the end of the year, right before New Year's, I would write a story about all the bad ones and make fun of them. [Laughs] And my favorite one of those I ever wrote about was Crown Roast of Franks, and it was hot dogs laced into the shape of a crown roast filled with canned potato salad. That's an extreme example of a bad one.

[0:27:45.7]

Annemarie Nichols: That's talented.

[0:27:48.6]

Judy Walker: Yeah. These people are getting their money's worth from their recipe developers, I tell you. [Laughs] So they would just get you ideas like that. And then at the end of the year, I'd just sort through all these press releases and I'd have a story ready to go. I learned that the way to survive this blitz of mail is to, number one, you've got to stay on top of it, but, number two, sort it, save it, and start saving the holiday stuff way

out ahead of time, because the holidays are always the biggest challenge, because you've got to fill up the biggest sections and you've already had ideas you can't use again. So you've got to think of something new and different.

[0:28:30.5]

Annemarie Nichols: I could see that being a challenge.

[0:28:33.1]

Judy Walker: Huge. When I retired from *The Times-Picayune*, I retired at the end of the year after Thanksgiving. [Laughs] They wanted me to stay through Thanksgiving and get through that one more time. So every year at the holidays, I'm like, "Oh, my god. I don't have to write a hardboiled-egg story again for Easter." I don't have to write any more King Cake stories unless I want to. I still write two columns a month for *The Times-Picayune*, which is a lot better than three blog posts a day that we were doing at one point near the end of my time there. It's a lot.

[0:29:09.2]

Annemarie Nichols: That is a lot. I want to talk about that transition. Why did you decide to come to New Orleans from Phoenix? Because that seems like it would be quite a bit of a leap.

[0:29:21.8]

Judy Walker: It was a huge change. It was a huge change. I had been at the newspaper there for twenty-one years, and you could really tell where the wind was blowing. I married my husband in 1988. We just celebrated our thirty-year anniversary. He was a writer and editor at the newspaper too. When we married, he was a writer at the alternative paper, but I had met him when he started at *The Republic*. He was like a copy editor, and then he quit and went over to the Alternative Weekly, which was one of the biggest in the country at the time. So he worked there, and then he eventually came back to *The Times-Picayune*, and he had done all these other feature jobs as well, and then he went into news.

[0:30:17.7] So I had sort of transitioned out of food and into other things and then back into food, and they had hired another food editor, and I was in the features department doing different things. I had been a home and garden writer—and I really enjoyed that— and doing all other kinds of different general beats in Features. So he was getting put on news, and he was not happy with what they were making him do. The editors would see a billboard on the way in to work and get a big idea from a billboard, and they'd make him go do it instead of what they'd promised him he could do when he came to their department. So he was ready to leave. So we saw an advertisement for the TV editor position, and he had been the TV editor before he was promoted to news. He was TV editor for years in Phoenix, and columnist. So that job became open here at *The Times-Picayune*, and so he got that job, and I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to freelance."

So I became a freelance writer when we moved here. I had just gotten my first magazine writer position. I did a lot of other freelance at first, but I got my first magazine gig for a national magazine right when a job became open at *The Times-*

Picayune for the home and garden writer, and I was hired as the home and garden writer, which was great, but I had to learn such a different climate between the desert and here, lush green stuff springing out of the ground, you've got to beat it back, it's so verdant. But anyway, I did that job, I don't know, two or three years, and then Dale Curry retired. So in 2004, Dale retired and they made me the food writer. So that's why we moved here.

[0:32:37.0]

Annemarie Nichols: Pretty good reason. What were your first impressions of New Orleans?

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Judy Walker: You mean just overall?

[0:32:46.6]

Annemarie Nichols: Yeah. Like, how did you feel about moving here?

[0:32:49.2]

Judy Walker: Oh, it was like moving to the other side of the planet. It was great, because Phoenix is such a transient place. The climate there is so extreme that people move there—and then we would sit around in features meetings, because the churn there—what they call "the churn" is when people move and leave, and people move there and then they leave, and this is a huge—they just can't take the climate. So we would sit

around in features meetings and talk about stories we'd written five years before, and we could write them again because we had all new readership, you know. Here, they couldn't do that.

[0:33:33.2] I remember Dave saying when he first started the features meeting here they seriously talked about a story and whether or not it would offend the voodoo community. [Laughs] It was really like moving to the other side of the world, you know. It was just so different from anyplace else ever, and I felt right at home with that. I loved it. I felt like I fit in here. The climate is so different. In a way, I saw this similarity. It's such an extreme place that sometimes people move *here* and they can't take how extreme it is and they move away, same thing as in Phoenix. It's just such a different type of place, you know, and I love that about it.

And I love the diversity. In Phoenix, the type of diversity that we had, it was always interesting to me because so many people are there in the wintertime from all these northern states and Canada. I didn't mention this, but one of the things I always did was I wrote a recipe exchange column. The first name of my recipe exchange column was "Recipe Roundup." Don't you love it? And so this was really one of the only resources people had if they were looking for a recipe. They had us and they had the land grant colleges. The ag centers would always have volunteers that would answer the phones and answer your food questions, so we spent a lot of our time answering consumer questions. People would just call up and ask us everything, and if people were looking for a recipe, they would write to us. *Gourmet* magazine had a column where you could write to them, but it might be months before you got your answer. But people would try and try different ways. There weren't blogs, there wasn't the Internet. The

only way that people got their food news was through newspapers and magazines and cookbooks. That was it.

[0:35:46.1] So, in Phoenix I started writing that kind of column too. In New Orleans, I started writing that column. Before me, there had been a freelancer that did it, that kind of column. But I always enjoyed it, because I got to, like, meet people, and I would get all these ideas from them and cooking tips and learn what they were doing.

But in Phoenix that diversity was people from, like, of Polish descent that were from the Detroit area or whatever or Lithuanian or all these, like, unusual little European communities. I remember going to one of the huge trailer—there's huge communities of mobile homes in the Phoenix area for retirees, and they're occupied mostly during the wintertime, but going out there at Christmastime to write about a woman's lefse. Do you know what lefse is? It's this incredible thing. It looks like a crêpe or tortilla, but it's made with potatoes, and it's a Scandinavian thing, and a lot of those communities will make it at Christmastime, because people during the holidays make their traditional food, whatever it is.

So she was of Scandinavian descent, and she was out here in her trailer home, this beautifully manicured—I can't overemphasize how beautiful these places are, because they would keep them up so beautifully. She said they're making lefse, her heritage heirloom recipe from her mother, out of potatoes. They're very intensive to make, so not something we really see in the South. So I would see stuff like that there, and, of course, the Native American cultures were fascinating, fascinating to cover, fascinating.

[0:37:39.1]

Annemarie Nichols: One of the things you mentioned in your kind of like final announcing your retirement was the Hopi wedding that you covered. Do you want to talk about that?

[0:37:47.5]

Judy Walker: Oh, god, yes. Oh, my god. The Hopi wedding was amazing. It was amazing, and I did it with my friend Mike Ging, who was the photographer that I did a lot of stories with. At one point in Arizona we had a food team, and we all worked together every week, and that was wonderful, because I love to do collaborative stuff, and it was all just really talented. We all became really close friends, and still are to this day.

So Mike and I went up to the Hopi Reservation, and, as you know, there are several different tribal lands all over Arizona. I didn't know very much about the Hopi at all. Because the Navajo are the largest tribe, you tend to just be exposed to them more. And I also was surprised when I moved from Oklahoma to Arizona, in Oklahoma, the Native Americans that I knew, they were in your everyday life. You worked with people who were Native Americans. My relatives were married to people who were Native Americans. People were like interwoven in your daily life. In Arizona, because of the reservation system, I just didn't meet as many people in my daily life as I had. I was surprised, and I passed by the big Indian school, was still there at the time on Indian School Road, and that was where the tribal kids were sent. It was closed not long after we moved there. I don't know when it closed.

[0:39:16.8] But anyway, so our neighbors across the street were museum people, and so they had known some Native Americans, but basically, if you knew Native

Americans, you would travel to wherever they were. So one of the women that I worked with, who was a wonderful person who has an incredible blog now—she's The Crafty Chica, if you ever want to look this up; her name's Kathy Murillo—her neighbors had two little kids, a man and woman. They were married legally in the Maricopa County court system. They had decided to have a traditional wedding with their families on the Hopi Reservation, and, through Kathy, I met with them and talked to them and arranged to go cover the wedding with Mike, and so we stayed in a hotel there and would travel back and forth.

The ceremony, they spent months, years, maybe. I don't know how long it took. I think it's probably in my original story. But they had spent years working up to this wedding. His family had woven special robes for her to wear and the special beautiful white leather leggings, these boots, and when she dies, that white gown will be her shroud. And the little girls had beautiful things to wear that the family had made. And so then her family had to make stuff for him, and I can't remember what all her family had to make for him.

So another part of it was they had to raise the grain. They raised the traditional Hopi blue corn for years, I think. I'd have to go back and check on all this. But they raised this corn, ground it into the grain, and had it ready to make the special foods for the wedding, and that took several seasons, I'm sure.

And then they had this exchange of gifts that was part of the whole thing. This was one of the most amazing parts. The exchange of gifts, part of it consisted of truckloads, a train of pickup trucks, right, one after the other coming up the road. So the headquarters of all this was, like, the bride's parents' home, which was like a nice big

doublewide, and they had cleared a room for the gifts. Here come these pickup trucks, one after the other, and they spent like half a day bringing these things into the home. At one point, I remember they had to open the window, and they were passing them in the window, and it was things like beautiful Pendleton blankets, all kinds of soft goods, things that people had made, I remember.

[0:42:41.3]The aunties, she had this whole army of aunties that were all part of the preparation, and I'm going around trying to interview a lot of them a lot of the time, and they all had these same kind of aprons on, looked like homemade aprons that crisscrossed in the back. They still made a lot of their garments at that time. I'm a quilter now, so I've always sewed, so I was interested in their aprons and their garments and stuff like that too. So there were aprons for her. I mean, I wish I could remember what more of the gifts were, but the main thing I remember about the gifts is how many of them there were, just the sheer amount of things. And then at one point her family took gifts to his family in the same huge amounts. [Laughs] I cannot explain how this was so huge.

I'm sure there was, like, meat involved, too, at one point that they were giving to each other, too, and one of the main meats there is mutton, because they raise sheep in that part of the lands. The Hopi Reservation is up on the high Arizona desert up here close to New Mexico. So one of the traditional foods they had made is piki bread, and it's where they take the blue corn and make it into this real thin, thin like a gruel, almost, and then they wipe it onto hot stones and make a real thing layer of bread, and then they roll that up into a roll, okay? So it's like this big and that big around, and it's like just millimeters thick. They had a bed, like a single bed, piled with rolls of piki bread.

[0:44:39.2]

Annemarie Nichols: That's crazy.

[0:44:40.8]

Judy Walker: [Laughs] It was unbelievable that they'd spent how long making. So there were meals involved. I can't remember how many meals there were, but I remember at one of the meals they cooked the mutton overnight in a pit. They also made a traditional mutton stew that included the eyeballs of the mutton, which I did not eat. [Laughs]

The bride's family was considered more traditional than the husband's family, okay, and as far as I could find out, the traditional part, what that meant was there was no soda served at the meals on the bride's half. That was one of the ways of being traditional, was no soda.

So it was just an incredible experience, and it culminated in the ceremony that was, like, early in the morning, and the bride, her name was Delight—what a wonderful name—and she was a wonderful, wonderfully calm, sweet-demeanor person. So all the ceremonies involved blue corn grain and tossing it at the sun in the morning. At one point, they put like a white flour on her face and, like, anointed her, almost, and then chanting and all the different prayers. There was a lot of prayers and the Native stuff.

I think one of the things that her family made for him that they had to provide was like a big basket that had been woven in like the shape of a shield, and the idea was

they'd have these things always in their home and they would be with them all their lives. But I think what they had made for him was a shield.

And I think maybe—I don't know, I'd have to go back and check on this too. I think at some point they have the big—I think there may have been like some kind of sweat lodge ceremony for him. I'm not sure. But it was important for them to go through, and I'm sure these kids remember it, and there were a passel of kids everywhere this whole time, so I'm sure these children remember it. They're adults by now.

So this was probably in 1997, maybe, somewhere in there, [19]97, [19]98. I don't know. I'd have to go back and look. But it was a great experience, and my friend Mike Ging took the most beautiful pictures. Oh, my gosh. And we traveled around a little bit elsewhere on the Hopi Reservation and took pictures and went to the old kivas and everything. It was an amazing experience.

[0:47:49.1]

Annemarie Nichols: It sounds like it. It sounds like it was really beautiful.

[0:47:51.7]

Judy Walker: It was incredible. And that was one of the few stories I ever had on the front page of the Sunday paper. They saved it for special play.

[0:47:58.8]

Annemarie Nichols: That's great.

[0:48:00.1]

Judy Walker: So it was fun.

[0:48:03.9]

Annemarie Nichols: So you go from spending twenty-one years with this kind of like really great diversity of indigenous people and also these Eastern European backgrounds—

[0:48:16.3]

Judy Walker: Mostly white people.

[0:48:18.8]

Annemarie Nichols: Yeah, all of this interesting kind of diversity to New Orleans. What was it like trying to, I guess, acclimate yourself as the food editor of a place that has such a strong culinary history?

[0:48:36.0]

Judy Walker: Oh, my god. One of the things I first realized was there are so many people that write about food, and they do such a great job about it. I mean, like, Julia Reed and all these different people wrote about food here. At that time, what's-his-name was based out of here for *The New York Times*. Rick Bragg was based out of New Orleans. Of course, he covered all kinds of news, but every now and then he'd whip out some incredible story.

Brett Anderson, he became the newspaper restaurant critic about the same time that my husband started in the year 2000, and he is an amazing writer, and he was a wonderful colleague and inspiration at all times, and he would just give me great ideas and tips and introduction to people. So he was like the closest in-house person I had to different things. But in the whole community there were just a *ton* of great food writers, so I always just felt *really* privileged to be one of them, and in New Orleans, I mean, I would tell people, "I've got the best newspaper beat in America, writing about food in New Orleans." I said that to dozens of people. [Laughs] They got tired of hearing me, I'm sure.

[0:49:59.5]

Annemarie Nichols: I bet. What are some things that you either changed when you moved into the position of food editor or that you brought with you?

[0:50:10.8]

Judy Walker: Well, Dale had given me a great grounding in what she did and when she did it and people to talk to, and I had a long interview with the person who was sort of the outgoing freelancer. The main freelancer that we had had at that time—we had Marcelle [Bienvenu], of course, and she continued for a long time. Then we had Constance Snow, she did two columns a week for us, and she did the recipe exchange column and then she would write another food story. So I had a long interview with her, and she decided she wanted to, like, leave the newspaper freelancing at that time, so she gave me a bunch of great tips and ideas. So I started in 2004 and I had done it for maybe a year, but the main

thing that changed everything was Hurricane Katrina, so I would have to say that's the main thing that happened.

[0:51:22.6]

Annemarie Nichols: Let's talk about that and kind of like—what did you do or how did the newspaper change in the aftermath of Katrina?

[0:51:33.6]

Judy Walker: So my husband was the TV critic, so because I'd been the home and garden writer, I was friends with Dan Gill, who was still the main garden freelancer. He is at the LSU AgCenter and has been for years, and he was our garden columnist, and he and his wonderful partner, his name is Duke Lester, had always told me I could come—because I didn't have any family around. People evacuated to where their family was. I didn't have any family in the near area, so my child and I went to Dan and Duke's house, and they live in Prairieville, which is a suburb south of Baton Rouge. My husband was going to stay here and watch TV and stay in our house, and, of course, the report—and so all these people are battened down at the newspaper, right, and so that was the tradition at the newspaper, to stay in the building—it's hurricane-proof—and they would ride out the storm. When we first moved here, when there was a hurricane threat, people would bring their families and their pets and just ride it out there. Well, so by the time Katrina came around, you couldn't bring your pets anymore and you couldn't really bring your families anymore either. They changed the rules through the years. But the core group of the

people was at the paper, and when it started flooding so bad, they left out in the newspaper delivery trucks, so they went to Baton Rouge.

[0:53:14.7] So when the storm was happening, the prediction just kept getting worse and worse and worse. I'm in Baton Rouge calling my husband, begging him—using the words "begging"—him to leave and come up there where we were. So I was afraid that our home was going to be sticks when we got back, you know. That's just the way it looked. So by the time he left, it was already raining. The storm bands were already starting to arrive and it was raining, so he missed the big evacuation. It took us ten hours sitting in five-mile-an-hour traffic. I learned how to text message sitting in traffic, because my friend in Arizona was texting me. She knew how to text. She was texting me and she told me how to text, and it was great that I learned, because that was the only way of communication we had for weeks. Even in Baton Rouge, the phone lines were so overloaded.

So he joined us in Prairieville and the newspaper evacuated to Baton Rouge just north of where we were, and they found a shopping center that was undergoing renovation, and it was empty because this renovation, and they rented offices, and the man who was our department head became the guy who went out and purchased all these computers and all these supplies to set up their temporary newsroom. So we're getting text messages from our boss, and the first thing he said to do was find housing, because that was a *huge* problem. So within like, I don't know, four or five days, we had realized that New Orleans was flooded. We couldn't go back there. There's all these stories that I could tell you endlessly, and there's been tons written about the newspaper situation

after Katrina. I mean, we won a Pulitzer Prize for the coverage of it, and I have it right over there. Of course I had to get one, because it was for our overall coverage.

[0:55:45.6] So the newsroom set up in Baton Rouge, and we would commute there and work out of that office, and it was an incredible experience, because it was like you're in a war together. I remember people walking around crying and just having nervous breakdowns over people they'd left in New Orleans that refused to leave and worrying about their house, and there were expeditions to go back.

There was a group of reporters that didn't leave. They were holed up in one of the reporters' houses that lives near the river. See, the Sliver by the River is what did not flood. The lands in the French Quarter and Uptown that are right by the Mississippi River, that's the high ground, so that's part of the 20 percent of New Orleans that didn't flood, and they were in a reporter's house up there trashing it. So there would be runs between here and there. We had a reporter that went back and forth taking supplies to them and rolls of film and everything. He was like the courier for them.

So they are covering it, and, at first, we printed the paper out of, I think, Houma, and they eventually started printing the paper out of one of our sister papers elsewhere. I'm not sure of all the details, but anyway, they get up and running, and they were able to continuously publish because we did have nola.com at that time, but we were separate entities. It was this weird arrangement. But the nola.com people were with us, and that guy, who was separated from his wife and child, sat there and put everything online, so we were able to, like, continuously publish. So they started being able to get, like, hard copies of the paper out, and it was distributed around Baton Rouge and everything.

[0:57:44.3] So anyway, the flood happens in—it was August 29th. Within like two or three weeks, I did my first food story. Before that, I did stuff in the office like man the phones, help people find housing, doing anything that needed done, you know. And so eventually we all started writing stories. I did reams of stories on how to rescue your furniture, what to do with your soaked rugs. If they were wool, you could save them. All that stuff. There had been a hurricane the year before that was not as severe, but everybody had evacuated for it, and I had a file of all this information that I had saved, like from the LSU AgCenter, about what to do and the formula for making your own homemade mold-stopping recipe to spray on your walls and stuff like that. So I wrote all those kinds of stories, remediation things.

So, eventually, I wrote a food story about MREs because the National Guard was everywhere handing them out. So I went down to Covington, because, of course, you could get to the North Shore, and interviewed people there handing them out at church, interviewed people who were receiving them and talked to them about what they liked about them. The seniors liked all the little snack-y things they put in the MREs. Teenage kids loved the entrees because they would heat themselves up. They had this great mechanism in them. And I took several back to the office, and we opened them up and ate them. [Laughs] And so I wrote this big story about the MREs and how people were, like, subsisting on them.

So, by October, they had gotten the office, the *Times-Picayune* building that's right over here still, back to where we could move back. You had to move back or lose your job, and so we stayed on the Westbank with my friend and were eventually able to

move here. I think it was sometime in October we published the first food section, maybe towards the end of October.

[1:00:25.7] So the newspaper went through these radical changes after the flood, and so they eliminated the whole business section, and that became just a front section, not its own separate thing, and the food section became the front page of the living section. So this was part of the whole continuous contraction of food pages that I saw my whole career, but it's still down to, like, nothing. It still carried, like, a little bit of advertising from the food companies, and they would put the grocery ads around it. So there were all these changes. So we did eventually get the food section back up and running.

So, because it was near the holidays, at the holidays, people are looking for recipes that they have lost, because they want to make their traditional things, so there was always more call for people looking for recipes then. So I tell one of these stories in our cookbook, so the year before when we'd had this hurricane, and it struck the Gulf Coast more than us, this woman had written me who had lived on the Gulf Coast—no, she was living in Baton Rouge, and her daughter had lost a recipe, and so we had helped her find a recipe in 2004 that her daughter had lost in a hurricane in someplace like around Biloxi, and this woman wrote to me from Baton Rouge wanting it.

So I started writing the recipe exchange column again, and, of course, I only had the recipe requests from before the storm, so we said, "Any kind of recipe you want to send in that'll help anybody," you know. The newspaper stories I was writing, the cover stories were all about comfort food. Every one was a variation on comfort food, so just different angles. But the recipes people wanted, the very first one that somebody wanted

that they had lost in Hurricane Katrina, the first person to answer it and give me that recipe was that woman in Baton Rouge that we had helped her find one the year before.

So I realized early on that if people lost their recipes in a storm, it was like losing their photographs, and a place with such a strong food culture as this, it was important to replace those. The analogy I always used was God forbid if San Francisco had another devastating earthquake. We don't want that to happen, but just imagine that it did. Would people want these recipes that they had before the earthquake? Maybe, maybe not. But in New Orleans that's part of the culture and people want to retain that, you know?

[1:03:41.2] But because people wanted these recipes, other people wanted to help them. The whole country responded to Hurricane Katrina. We realized the whole country was affected very much by this huge tragedy, the whole country, and so I had people from, like, New Zealand on the Internet sending me recipes, because everybody wanted to help. And also, if you're, like, say, an older person living in even Baton Rouge or other areas nearby, you can't go gut houses, but you can go search your recipe boxes. You can do this research for another person and be meaningful to them. So the holidays really helped get it going, because I did have a lot of requests for that.

One of the stories I did about comfort food was my friend who was the book editor who I sat near, Susan Larson, told me that the local bookstores were doing huge sales of all the heritage cookbooks. All the bestselling cookbooks the past years that were related to New Orleans food were flying off the shelves, so people were replacing their cookbooks that they used for reference books, and I got a lot of good information for that when I wrote about the cookbooks, and people had the saddest stories about

losing their cookbooks, old, old, copies of *The Picayune Creole Cookbook* with their grandmother's handwriting in it and stuff like that. So, you just heard heartbreaking story, one after the other.

[1:05:46.2] So, after October, it was up and running, and so we had a food section after that. It occurred to me early on that we should compile all these recipes, that people would want another book with all of those in them. So, eventually, this lady wrote me a letter on lined notebook paper, said, "I collect cookbooks. They were all lost in my home, and all these horrible things happened to me. We lost our home, we lost our cars, we lost our business, and I broke my legs, broke both legs, when I was—." Well, basically a tree fell on her in their evacuation home, and she couldn't be evacuated out of the house for several days. They couldn't get her out of the house. Just a nightmare story. And this letter was so moving. Her name was Judy Laine. This story was so moving, I took the letter and went to the publisher of the whole newspaper, Ashton Phelps, who was a great leader during the Katrina. This was, like, I don't know, maybe a year later, I don't know, sometime later, and I said, "Ashton, we really need to do this. We should write a cookbook."

So he put in on the head of our department, who decided, okay, we should do this. He sort of didn't have a choice. So he got an agent, and he said, "Marcelle's going to be the coeditor," because Marcelle was the big name in the food editor. She was much better known as a food writer than me, and probably still is. So Marcelle and I collaborated, and she was a *great* person to work with. I so much enjoyed that.

So, eventually, it took three years. We had great publishers. The book proposal that we developed with our agent was on the desk of an editor at Chronicle Books when

they got back from a trip to New Orleans to gut houses. You know how people came from all over the world to do this work. So that was there when she got back from her trip. Her name is Amy Treadwell. So we did the project with Chronicle Books, and it came out in 2009, which is still, like, four years. It was incredible. So we start selling the cookbook. Chronicle Books, based in San Francisco, they assume this is going to be a regional title, and we start selling them like crazy. All the local events went super well, and we did some events—we had a little book tour. We went over to—what's the famous bookstore in Fairhope? Did one there. Did a couple more, anyway, with both me and Marcelle.

[1:08:53.2] So we're going to go home. My husband and I are going to go to Arizona to visit his relatives for Christmas that year, 2009, so he said, "Why don't we arrange to have a book signing in—." [Crying] I can't believe this. "A book signing in Arizona, and we'll invite all our friends." Sure, we'll have a party. We contact one of the independent bookstores there. It's a nice big bookstore, and they ordered I don't know how many, maybe two cartons, maybe sixty books. We had the event. Sold out before our friends even got there.

[1:09:38.2]

Annemarie Nichols: That's awesome.

[1:09:40.2]

Judy Walker: Huge line of people, and the very first person in line to buy cookbooks was buying it for her friends that were two gay men that moved there after Katrina to

Phoenix, and everybody in that line had their own story of how they'd been affected by Katrina, you know, everybody. One person was a meteorologist that taught meteorology at ASU, and they were buying it because the title is *Cooking Up a Storm*, and it was related to a hurricane. [Laughs] But most of them had, like, a personal story or they'd lived in Louisiana or something. But they sold out, like, very quickly, and that's what made me realize it had national reach. And Chronicle submitted it for the James Beard Awards, and we were nominated in the American category. So Marcelle and I traveled—I guess it was the following April—to New York for the ceremony, and we did not win, but we did have a great trip to New York.

[1:10:45.1]

Annemarie Nichols: Can you tell me about that experience?

[1:10:46.6]

Judy Walker: It was so fun. It was so fun. John T [Edge] organized—I think it was John T—organized a lunch for all the southern writers that we went to at—I can't remember what restaurant. He would probably remember it. We went to that. The newspaper would only spring for one room. We had to split a room, right? We had to talk them into sending us and promised to, like, not spend too much money, but because Marcelle had been an instructor at—did she talk about this at all?

[1:11:24.5]

Annemarie Nichols: Mm-hmm.

[1:11:25.8]

Judy Walker: Because she'd been an instructor, we went to some great restaurant. Maybe it's in her interview. We went to some great restaurant her students had worked at, and had this wonderful meal. Her nephew and his wife came on that trip too. They stayed at, of course, a really nice big hotel and did like a little vacation time, and they went to the ceremony with us. So they were sort of doing their own thing, and they went to see this singer the first night they were there at some club out in New York, and they came back the next day telling us about this crazy singer they had seen, and it was Lady Gaga. [Laughs]

[1:12:16.3] But we went to church at St. Patrick's Cathedral. We went to see an exhibit that Marcelle wanted to go see that was at—what's one of the really high-end jewelers? Not Tiffany's, but another *beautiful* jewelry store, like on Fifth Avenue or something. That was *really* fun. And I wanted to go see an exhibit that was at the American Folk Art Museum of quilts, so we went to the American Folk Art Museum and I got to see that. The hotel where we were staying was in Koreatown, and so we went to some of these great shops and places around there that sold all kinds of different stuff related—and, I don't know, we bought some kind of stuff and brought it home.

I think we were just there, like, maybe two nights, maybe three nights, but it was a great experience. And, of course, we didn't win, and we were disappointed, but we went out with—I think the Brennans were there. I think maybe that was the year that Dottie Brennan was inducted, and we went out with them afterwards and stayed, and, of course, we had a lot of drinks because we didn't win. [Laughs]

And I remember Brett Anderson was there covering it, as he covered the Beard Awards for years. I don't know whether he said this then or afterwards—and he was friends with a person who did win, and he knew her work very well, but, of course, we were the hometown, so he was rooting for us. So it was a great experience. It was a great trip.

[1:13:58.2]

Annemarie Nichols: Sounds like it was really fun.

[1:14:01.4]

Judy Walker: It was. It was a great experience. It was a great experience. Yeah, I didn't take the right shoes, but oh, well. [Laughs]

[1:14:08.2]

Annemarie Nichols: Can we backtrack a little bit and talk about the process of coming up with that cookbook? Because it's very thick. There's lots of different recipes.

[1:14:18.8]

Judy Walker: Yes. I brought a copy of it down here.

[1:14:23.4]

Annemarie Nichols: It tells a lot of really poignant stories about folks and their relationship to New Orleans food.

[1:14:30.5]

Judy Walker: Yes. I thought I brought a copy. I have a copy down here. Of course, we had saved all these stories through writing the column and everything, and so Marcelle had her stories. Marcelle had somebody staying at her house and had experienced Katrina in that way. I had the direct stories from the people who had told me all these incredible things. So we sort of combined all of them. We would have these periodic meetings and we would develop our recipe list and all that we wanted to go through. So we told the readers that we were going to do this, and they asked for specific things, so there were things that we were looking for that, like, we never found, but only a couple of those. There was some specific gumbo that we were looking for that we never found.

So a lot of the recipes were things that the newspaper had printed that they weren't part of the real established New Orleans canon of foods, but they were things that people ate here on a regular basis. They were known things. One example is there's a cheese spread that—I don't know who originated it, but Langenstein's grocery is famous for it, Robért Fresh Market carries it, and it's called Better Cheddar. So somebody from Uptown had sent us this recipe that she had developed that was like it, and so we called it "Better than Better Cheddar," and that's the kind of thing that people ate all the time, but it wasn't necessarily known outside the region. Just something as simple as, like, white beans, people outside of New Orleans, they don't know that people here eat white beans. They know about red beans and rice, but they don't know about white beans and rice. I need to put my hands on that book, and I can give you some more examples of that kind

of thing. So those kind of recipes were sort of emblematic of, like, the everyday things that people wanted.

We had some recipes from restaurants that people wanted that we put in there. I think the Pontchartrain Hotel's Mile-High Pie was in there, and the Icebox Pie that had originated at the Pontchartrain Hotel as well, and then that was the exact same thing they still served at Clancy's Restaurant still to this day. So we had recipes like that in there and recipes that readers had developed and sent in through the years that other readers had adopted and made through the years, and I love that, because our recipes had become part of their family now and they wanted that recipe back. So that's kind of what we had relied on, and so we didn't test a lot of them because we didn't have to. They'd been in the paper and these people had been making them, so we didn't test a lot of the recipes. We didn't have to.

[1:17:57.3] Marcelle contributed a lot of her favorite recipes, her tried-and-true things that we had to have in there, like her crawfish pie. If you make one recipe out of that cookbook, make her crawfish pie. Make it every Easter. Oh, my god, it's fabulous. So a lot of Marcelle's recipes are just the really tried-and-true best things, you know.

So we kept all those things. Together we wrote the header notes. We worked closely with the editors when it got down to it answering all these questions they would have about different things, and we had a really good—Amy was a wonderful editor. I will say this. And the people who were like the copy editors of it were great.

One of the big early-on considerations was art. Well, back in those days, we didn't have a lot of photography of food. A lot of papers, they would run a picture with every recipe. We didn't do that at that time. In my recipe exchange column, I would just

have three recipes, and it would have just the logo of the column on it. I didn't have pictures of every recipe. And now they want that for the Internet, because people won't click on something unless it's got a picture. But back in the day we didn't have to. We would have pictures for the main stories, but a lot of the recipes they wanted were not from main stories. So the head of our department tried to find some pictures early on. He and the photo editor went through it and tried to find some pictures, but they didn't try very hard. So, Chronicle was known for really making beautiful books, and so they chose to not have a lot of photos in it, and that's probably ultimately why it did not win a James Beard Award, because by that time, you need pictures in your cookbook. So ours was a throwback in that way to a community cookbook. In that way, it's a traditional community cookbook.

[1:20:13.0] We put a glossary in at the end. I'm glad we did. We added to it. We have a great index. I am a big believer in indexes in cookbooks so you can find things. We dedicated to—all these people went through it, because, really, it was a community effort. Marcelle and I were just the coeditors. It was really like a group effort for all the readers, and when we had these series of book signings through the way, it was incredible, because these people came out of the woodwork to these book signings. I'll never forget at a book signing in Gretna at the Gretna Farmers' Market on the Westbank—so one of the things Chronicle had done to promote the book signings was they said, "Pick out one recipe, and we'll print it on like a bookmark as like a little handout." So I had picked out this recipe. You've got to take this mic off me for a second so I can run over there and get the cookbook, okay?

[Pause to get cookbook]

Let me just look it up in our wonderful index. See this beautiful typeface and all that? They just did a fabulous job. Look how many times Dale is mentioned; over and over. So I found this recipe that had shrimp in it, because shrimp is one Louisiana food that's very dear to us, but you can get it anywhere in the country, and so I picked this shrimp recipe to go on the little bookmarks. Let me see if this is it. I think it had the lady's name on it. No, this was Marcelle's recipe. Anyway, this recipe was named after the person, and I think it had her name on the bookmark, and here she was standing in front of me. Here it was. Mrs. Frances Twomey's Fresh Corn and Shrimp Chowder, and here was Mrs. Frances Twomey at the signing. So, stuff like that happened over and over again. Yeah, it was this recipe, and this is a wonderful recipe.

And people, you know, they told us stories. It was just incredible, and I kept track of the stories, too, that people told us at the book signings, and then I'd write about them, too, in the column, in the recipe exchange column, or other stories too.

[1:23:30.6]

Annemarie Nichols: Sounds like a really emotional job to have.

[1:23:33.9]

Judy Walker: It was, it was. Oh, yeah. I only broke down a few times. [Laughs] I broke down the first time I got the letter from Judy Laine because her story was so awful, and only a few other times, at some of the book signings every now and then when I would meet somebody that was especially— you know. So, yeah, it was. It meant everything to me. I always said it was like the pinnacle of my career.

[1:24:06.8]

Annemarie Nichols: I bet.

[1:24:12.3]

Judy Walker: So then Chronicle published it. So, through the years, they had asked us, "Do you want to do something else? Do you want to do a cookbook about recipes from restaurants in New Orleans?"

We're like, "There's a million of those. We don't want to do that."

So we never did do a follow-up cookbook, so what they decided to do—the first cookbook was paperback—they decided to do a hardback for the tenth anniversary, so then they reissued it.

So we did a ton of media coverage, too, that Chronicle arranged to do that were like—of course, newspaper food editors contacted us, and I did a ton of stories that they wrote about the cookbook when it came out, and we did a bunch of radio interviews. Chronicle contracted with these people who arrange radio interviews, and we did radio interviews across the whole country. We did an NPR interview. Marcelle did that one, but I did a lot of them. I did most of them. Then there was another whole spate of publicity when the tenth-anniversary edition came out. And what's really rewarding is everybody has it now. It's one of those traditional cookbooks.

[1:25:47.1]

Annemarie Nichols: That's really nice, and I understand why, because it has a lot of really good recipes in it.

[1:25:54.3]

Judy Walker: Mm-hmm, a lot of things people cook every day.

[1:26:00.8]

Annemarie Nichols: I have another question about—so Dale Curry was at *The Times-Picayune* for a long time, and then you were the food editor, and now Ann Maloney's the food editor. There's been kind of a long tradition of female leadership. What do you think are some of the things that women have contributed to at *The Times-Pic*, the food section, and the New Orleans food scene as a whole?

[1:26:32.3]

Judy Walker: Well, Dale came from the news side, so Dale was great at covering food as more of a news beat, you know. She was great at covering trends and spotting them, and like the thing with the turkey fryer, you know, things like that, she would know when something was new and different and write about it, and she was also great about covering nutrition trends and all the things like that. A lot of it's just keeping up with what's going on and letting people know what's different.

One of the things I like to do and I was able to do a few times was, because I had—Dale came from Memphis and lived here for a long time before—well, she'd lived here for a long time, but I was an outsider, so I was able to realize what people here

didn't know. I'll never forget having a conversation with our managing editor. This was a wonderful thing. The managing editor, Jim Amoss, knew about food. He went to the farmers' market. There was no saying his wife liked it, although Ashton Phelps did say that to me a couple times, but the great thing about New Orleans is everybody cooks, men and women. But people here did not realize that men and women don't cook elsewhere. In Arizona, men only cooked when it was a hobby. Here, it's just part of the culture, so I wrote about that.

[1:28:25.1] So this conversation I had with Jim Amoss was about finger sandwiches. You know how they're a huge deal in New Orleans. You can go into any supermarket and buy a tray of little sandwiches with the edges cut off, all year. You can do this. Everyplace else, they're little tea sandwiches. They're served at tea. They're not served everywhere else. He didn't know that. They're not served everywhere, but here they're a huge deal, and it's because of the drinking culture—this is one of my theories—because you've got to lay down a little base before you start drinking. [Laughs] So that was part of it. So that was fun to be able to, like, make those observations.

This was a really fun one I did. I interviewed this woman. I can't remember how I met Miss Linda. I wish I could. So you know about Linda Green that makes the yakamein, the yakamein soup? She had been a cafeteria lady in the New Orleans Public School System, but on the side, she would go out and make the soup that her mother had made for second lines on the weekend, mostly on Sunday, and she would serve soup for the second lines. This was before Katrina, because I remember finding her after the storm. So I wrote a whole story about her. Went to her house, she made it for me. I

couldn't believe how salty it was, but it was delicious. I love salty. And wrote her whole story up and this whole thing about yakamein. Nobody knew how to pronounce it. It was one of the things only black people in New Orleans wrote about. I'll never forget one of my husband's golf partners saying to me, "I've lived here all my life and I never knew about this." You know? So there were still things to be discovered about the food culture, and pointed out, and I *loved* to do that. So that was kind of like my little contribution.

The fact that we were women I don't think made any difference at all, you know. I think men would have covered it just the same. Brett Anderson would write a great feature story every now and then, bust one out. He was mostly doing restaurant reviews at that time. So I don't think women necessarily had that much to do with it, you know.

But, anyway, did that answer your question?

[1:31:07.5]

Annemarie Nichols: Yes, definitely. Thank you. Can you talk, too, about some of the contributors? Because you guys have also had some contributors who are really important to the food section. Would you talk about them?

[1:31:21.8]

Judy Walker: Yes, yes, yes. In fact, some of the things I found, okay? A reader gave me this. This is clippings of Myriam Guidroz's columns out of *The Times-Picayune*. So Myriam Guidroz, now, she was before my time. I never knew her. I interviewed her daughters after she was gone, and she had been a columnist. She was Belgian and spoke

French, and she had been a cooking teacher Uptown, and so she had a longstanding column that she wrote about her food and recipes, and so this is like a little notebook of her stuff.

So I look at these books a lot, *La Bouche Creole*. There were two of them. In fact, I think I have two copies of this. Look, I do. Leon Soniat was his name, Leon Soniat, Jr., and he was a food columnist for *The Times-Picayune* long before my time and was long gone, and he just wrote the most charming stories about his "*ma mère*." He had a very traditional old Creole upbringing back in the day with his "*ma mère*" and his grandmother, and he would just write the most charming, charming stories about his life and these recipes, and he was always a fabulous cook. So they were all collected by a local publisher into these two books, *La Bouche Creole* and *La Bouche* traditional recipes. Some of them, they kind of lack a few things here and there, but on the most part—and just the stories are so incredibly well written and charming. Everyday food, chicken sausage gumbo. They were wonderful things to have as a resource.

[1:33:17.1] So those are two of the columnists. Of course, Marcelle was the one I got to work with most closely, and she turned in her column every week. We also later started carrying Molly Kimball, a nutrition columnist. She's still in there, in the paper. Constance Snow was the one before me that worked with Dale, and Constance went on to write two really nice cookbooks, and I don't know what happened to her. She just disappeared off the face of the Earth. She might be somewhere on the North Shore, I don't know, but her book was *Gulf Coast Cookery*, and it was really good and kind of groundbreaking.

[1:34:02.3]

Annemarie Nichols: How did you learn how to cook all of this traditional New Orleans cuisine too? Because you have a YouTube channel, or you did.

[1:34:10.7]

Judy Walker: Yes. They didn't put the stuff on YouTube till much later. When I was making all those videos, they wouldn't put them on YouTube, even though we were begging them to.

[1:34:20.7]

Annemarie Nichols: Why wouldn't they do that?

[1:34:22.1]

Judy Walker: [Whispers] Because they were idiots. [Nichols laughs.] No. They didn't want to. They wanted to keep all revenue for themselves, you know, YouTube.

So I always had a copy of *The Picayune Creole Cookbook* in Arizona, and I would make stuff out of it occasionally. Okay, so the boyfriend that I moved from Tulsa to Phoenix with, he was from Lafayette, and he would make gumbo occasionally. He said you stir the roux for three beers. Maybe it was two beers. So we would cook, and a couple times we came here on vacation. We came here for Mardi Gras in the [19]80s on vacation. Wonderful. And we went to Cajun country, did all this big trip around. So we'd go home and have a big dinner party and stuff. So I would cook out of that and other Louisiana cookbooks.

I had a copy of *Talk About Good!* from Lafayette and just other different Louisiana cookbooks, and I had recipes that I made for years that I learned at that 1987 conference here. Every year for Thanksgiving I would make this recipe with a broiled praline topping for sweet potatoes. It's a delicious thing, and I would make that every year.

[1:35:52.3] And then when I moved here, I remember having this conversation with my friend Charlotte Porter, who was head of the AP bureau when we moved here. We knew her in Phoenix, so we talked to her a lot, and I remember having this conversation with Charlotte about how in Phoenix, such a big community, so many ethnic restaurants, every kind, of course, heavy, heavy concentration of Mexican restaurants that everybody there goes once a week. You've got your favorite neighborhood, you've got your favorite one for this dish, that dish. And we moved here, and we are bereft. We are starving for good Mexican food.

I remember Charlotte explaining to me how the New Orleans food culture was so strong, it did not really permit—people just didn't—there just weren't a lot of different ethnic restaurants. There were some. There were, of course, Chinese, because the Chinese established restaurants in *every* city across the nation, and there were some Vietnamese by then, and a few others. There weren't many. I'll never forget going to a Mexican restaurant and asking the chef what part of Mexico he was from, and he was, like, from Metairie, you know. It's just, like, bad. It was bad. It wasn't until after Hurricane Katrina that we got any decent Mexican restaurants here, in my opinion.

So, anyway, what was the question? How did I learn how to cook these things? So everybody knows you have to learn how to cook gumbo if you live in New Orleans.

You just do. So we started trying to cook it right away, and red beans and rice. You're exposed to it. It's delicious. You want to make it.

I was overwhelmed by the amount of fried food when I moved here, but coming from Arizona, in a way, it's like California cuisine. It's clean, you know, and not a lot of fried foods. But I also really quickly realized people here know how to fry really well. They can do it to perfection, so it's not like greasy Mexican food in Arizona that I experienced. It was delicious, light fried seafood. But anyway, I never tried to fry seafood a lot, but we would cook other kinds of seafood, so I just learned from doing it.

[1:38:30.0] And then when we started doing the different videos at the paper, we would spend time developing the recipes and getting them where we wanted them to, and I did that whole thing for years. I mean, we just started with my friend standing here in my kitchen. And all those videos are wiped out. They saved them, and I started doing them with—it's a lot easier to talk to somebody else rather than to just stand in front of the camera yourself and spout off, so I got a young person from the staff, and, oh, my god, this guy I had first, his name's Danny Monteverde. He's now a producer at one of the local TV stations. He's a great newsman. But Danny, his mother didn't cook. He was clueless. He was like the perfect straight man, because not only did he not know how to cook, he didn't know what a bunch of stuff was, even. I would tell him to cook something till it was opaque, and he didn't know what opaque meant, so I could really, like, bounce stuff off of Danny, and he was game for anything. He was great. He was great.

And then we decided we wanted to do the Louisiana series. That's the ones that are on YouTube. I got them to move them all over to YouTube after I left. When they

decided they were going to change service providers for the videos, that's why they all went away. So we decided we were going to do the Louisiana ones, and I did them with Diya Chacko, who was another wonderful young person on our staff, and she did grow up eating really good food. She grew up in New Orleans. Her parents came from India, but she did grow up eating New Orleans food. Her dad had been a professor in the hospitality department over at UNO and knew wine and did a beautiful wine trip to Europe every year. So she was a very sophisticated eater, but had never cooked, and she was game for anything, too, and she's very, very smart, a wonderful young person, and she's now head of the digital department at the newspaper in Orange County, California, at *The Orange County Register*. She went there not long after I left the paper, after I retired. But Diya and I had a wonderful time, so we did all the New Orleans recipes, and I would cook them several times.

[1:41:03.9] By that time, another incredible woman on our staff named Lynette Johnson became our producer, so I would go over the whole thing with Lynette, give her a least the script, so we knew what we were doing. And we had a great photographer who was, like, our whole head of photography. So, by that time, we would do stuff like Lynette would stand on a ladder, on my tallest kitchen ladder, and aim the second camera down the pot. So we got more sophisticated as we went along. But that was a huge hit when we did the New Orleans recipes. It was huge. So we got to explore some less-known stuff like grits and grillades. Everybody knows the gumbos and the jambalayas, and I did the New Orleans jambalaya instead of the Cajun jambalaya that's sort of taken over. So that was really fun, but because we would also write it up as a story, I would have to have the recipe intact before we even started, so it was all, like, kind of scripted

before we'd go, I mean not what we said, but at least we knew what we were doing, pretty much.

[1:42:31.6]

Annemarie Nichols: That sounds nice.

[1:42:32.5]

Judy Walker: So those are all still on YouTube, and I'm glad.

[1:42:33.9]

Annemarie Nichols: They're cool videos.

[1:42:37.3]

Judy Walker: Oh, thanks.

[1:42:38.4]

Annemarie Nichols: I have a question about recipe testing, too, because that's the only thing I think I haven't asked you about. Can you talk about, like, that process and how you used it while you were a food editor?

[1:42:52.9]

Judy Walker: Okay. What happened was because I knew how to cook and because I knew how to edit recipes, I mostly did not have to test recipes. Now, some I did, but, in

the main, I was producing way too much copy to have to test them, to be able to test them. If it wasn't a good recipe, I didn't publish it, you know, and we didn't have a budget for it. I would make stuff for photography very often in Arizona and here, and so in that way, I would make those cover-story recipes through having to make them for food styling. And I learned food styling from the Chicago food editors conference, and I used that for years, but that was another thing I learned from the food editors conferences. But anyway, yeah, so I didn't do a ton of testing. I do way more testing now because I've got time.

[1:43:52.9]

Annemarie Nichols: That's nice.

[1:43:56.1]

Judy Walker: Yeah, yeah. I've been doing recipe development for a couple of local brands, and I also have gone back to magazine writing. I write for the local grocery magazine on a freelance basis, *Rouses* magazine. Have you ever seen their magazine?

[1:44:12.0]

Annemarie Nichols: I haven't seen their magazine.

[1:44:13.1]

Judy Walker: You should pick one up. Oh, I'll give you one. I've got one here. But it's a professionally produced magazine, and they have all the best food writers in the

region and around write for them because they pay really well. They pay a traditional magazine rate of a dollar a word.

[1:44:33.7]

Annemarie Nichols: That's nice.

[1:44:36.3]

Judy Walker: Yeah, it's real nice. And the editor's great, and I knew her for years from working with her at the paper. She was the Rouses person, and so I knew her for years, and she had asked me for years if I wanted—well, as soon as I retired, she asked me if I wanted to, and so, no, I was doing all I wanted. When I retired, my column, I was doing one a week, still. That was all I wanted to do. The day they told me they were cutting my column back to two a month I called Marcy. So, she's a champ, and through her I got to know the advertising agency that represents a lot of local brands, so that's been really fun, and I get to really focus on the recipes and play with them. I just got a new toy. I just got an electric pressure cooker.

[1:45:24.9]

Annemarie Nichols: Sounds fun. [lLughs]

[1:45:27.0]

Judy Walker: It's great. It's great, yeah. Yeah, it's fun.

[1:45:31.7]

Annemarie Nichols: Well, I think that I have spent a lot of time with you, and probably you're worn out.

[1:45:40.4]

Judy Walker: No, no, I'm fine.

[1:45:42.3]

Annemarie Nichols: Is there anything else that you want to add that you feel like we didn't cover or that you just want to say on record?

[1:45:48.5]

Judy Walker: About newspaper food writing? It was a fabulous career. It really was. I really enjoyed it. I wanted to show you these—so the food editors group, for years as fundraisers, they would solicit recipes from members, and we wrote several cookbooks, and that's one of them. This is one of the best ones. So these are great little cookbooks, and we did different things, different topics. I don't have all of them, I don't think. And I didn't tell you about my cookbooks either. So I published seven cookbooks, seven Southwestern cookbooks too. When I was in Arizona, one of the things we had done—so I got this call one day out of the blue from a publisher in Flagstaff from this publishing company that was known for their art books, beautiful photography books, the Southwestern desert scenes and all that. So she said, "I'm one of the editors, and we're looking for cookbook ideas. Do you have any?"

And I said, "Well, we've been having these recipes contests for the past several years," that I had organized at the paper there.

The paper owned this beautiful property called the R&G Ranch, Republic and Gazette Ranch, and it was like a private park with this big house. It was a private park. It was a perk for employees. So I said, well, we had all these recipes from these contests. So it took me about a year, and, of course, we didn't have any pictures. So these are recipes from that.

[1:47:50.2] Well, they were thrilled with the cookbook, so they asked me to do some more. I had just had my child, and so the first one I did took me a couple of years to write. So this was the first one I wrote, and then I hooked up with my girlfriend who's a fabulous cook. She's an attorney in Phoenix. And so she and I wrote, like, five more for them, and the last one was published, I think a year and a half after I moved here. So that was sort of the end of our collaboration, but because of that experience writing cookbooks for them, I knew how to do *Cooking Up a Storm* when that opportunity came along, and how to work with a publisher, how to work with the editors, the copy editing and all that. So that was a big experience in contribution to that. So, those were fun, and I think one or two of them might still be in print. Of course, the publisher has now been sold. The publishing business has contracted just like newspapers. So I still get royalties. It's like nothing now, but something. [Laughs] But I did have experience doing that.

This was like the bestselling one. This was a fun one. And I do have some other cookbooks somewhere from other friends, and so this one was from my friend Donna Lou Morgan, and she was *The Salt Lake Tribune* editor for years. She died in the [19]90s, bless her heart. She was a wonderful person.

But anyway, this was a very common thing in that era for newspaper food editors to have a cookbook, but their readers wanted it, you know. That was one of the great things about being a newspaper food editor. You really felt like you had a close relationship with the readers from your day-to-day work, you know. You had this real relationship with them that was the real thing, and it was very meaningful. So, all across the country I'm sure that happened. So I knew Donna Lou from getting together with her at the newspaper food editors meetings, and she and I also went to France.

[1:50:16.6] One of the other great perks of my job in Arizona was back in the day, way back in the day, one of the perks they took before it became unethical was they would accept trips from, like, these companies that offered them to people who would go along and write travel stories. This was one of the feature editor's great perks of his job, was he got to hand out these stories, these travel assignments, to people. And so I went to Italy twice and France once and got to have these fabulous experiences eating Parmesan cheese standing on a hill, Parma ham. The trip to France was wonderful, and I went with Donna Lou to that. She was a trip. She was great. And there would be, like, small groups escorted. The first one I went on was like—one of the co-sponsors was Pan Am. That's how long ago that was. [Laughs] So, yeah, that was a great experience too.

[1:51:23.0]

Annemarie Nichols: Sounds like it. Well, thank you very much.

[1:51:29.1]

Judy Walker: Sure. Thank you.

[1:51:29.3]

Annemarie Nichols: I really appreciate it.

[1:51:29.5]

Judy Walker: Sure. It was great. It was great.

[End of interview]