



**Donna Battle Pierce**

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[00:00:00.00]

**Annemarie A.:** All right, I can hear you. So, good afternoon. We are at the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Public Library in Memphis, Tennessee. I am Annemarie Nichols recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance—and, actually, I'm Annemarie Nichols Anderson. [Laughter] And I am here with Ms. Donna Battle Pierce. Would you like to introduce yourself for the recorder?

[00:00:25.12]

**Donna P.:** Yes. Donna Battle Pierce, I am thrilled to be here. I am a journalist, a food historian and journalist, and I—I just, on my way here to this library, realizing how much I love libraries.

[00:00:46.28]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great. Could we—well, do you mind sharing your birthdate for the record? You don't have to if you don't want to.

[00:00:54.24]

**Donna P.:** I'm not going to share the year. [Laughter] And the reason, it's so funny, my sister and I have a different thing on this. I don't want to be put into a category, per se, based on that. But I was born on March 25, I was born on Easter Sunday.

[00:01:10.19]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great.

[00:01:13.15]

**Donna P.:** And in the early [19]50s. [Laughter]

[00:01:17.07]

**Annemarie A.:** Great. So, let's start and talk a little about your early life. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

[00:01:20.25]

**Donna P.:** My family is five generations from Mobile, Alabama, the Gulf of Mexico. And my grandmother used to call it south of the South, because it was so—when people say Alabama, there were so many thoughts people had about what Alabama was, but this, to me, when we would go down to visit, this was fascinating and kind of . . . kind of a loose and interesting city with seafood. My mother, in fact, only grew up eating seafood and didn't—meat was not a part of their diet, because everything there was shrimp and oysters and all of that kind of thing. My parents were both college grads. I come from five generations of college graduates, and that was significant to them because of the fact, my great-grandparents had gone to Fisk and my great-grandfather was a physician from Meharry. They moved after they both graduated from college. My mother's graduation, they got married the month after, and then they moved with us to—I mean, they moved to Missouri and had us right away. I was born nine months after their wedding. I'm realizing, and I realized after reading about migration, first-generation migration. They moved from this wonderful environment, in terms of culturally, of lots of professional

black people who were doctors and lawyers and they moved from a really wonderful spot socially, wonderful homes, to a place where it was very sparse and barren, very few middle-class black people. They called us their "soldiers of integration." They said, "We don't want to raise our children in a place where there are places you can't go. And whatever it takes, we're going to make sure that you are in a place where it's integrated." However, where they moved us—and it officially was supposed to be, Missouri. And we moved to Poplar Bluff, Missouri, which my son teases me about all the time, because I have an adult son, and he teases me about that because he said—I lived in San Francisco for fifteen years and that was very important. I loved it, and it was great. And I made sure, when he was born, I made sure that not only was he born in my favorite hospital, he goes, "Mom, that was only because you were born in Poplar Bluff, Missouri that all of that matters to you so much." But we moved there. It was segregated. My parents integrated as teachers every school they went to, and then my sisters and I integrated every school that we went to. From there, my father had been brought there by the president of Lincoln University in Missouri, and he ran programs in Poplar Bluff. My mother was a teacher, and then my parents—my father became the principal. He was the last principal of a place called Dalton Vocational School, and that was in northwest Missouri, north of Kansas City. It was this amazing campus that looked like a college campus. All of the teachers lived on campus, and it was really beautiful, and it was a working farm. However, the reason for that was so that blacks would not go to white schools. They bussed kids as far as two hours away to come to this school, so it was this giant school, and we were little girls there. My dad was this handsome, dashing principal of the school. My mother was this gorgeous woman who—and they were these

courageous, amazing people that decided they were going to do this. I remember, one of my very first memories—and as I think and always talk about why I love what it is about food, that matters so much to me—we were little girls standing out in the yard in front of the school, and the principal's house was this really lovely home. We had a maid and whatever. My father had grown up with a cook and a maid. And we were standing out there, and the lady brought out the chicken. My mom said, "I'll do that." My mother . . . she was determined that she was going to wring the chicken's neck. We stood there, and I can remember this vividly, watching her wring the chicken's neck. She, afterwards, she got sick—physically ill—but she did it, and she was so proud of herself. We were just shocked. And this was, this is the courage, this is the mom that I grew up with.

[00:06:50.21]

**Annemarie A.:** That's really great.

[00:06:53.00]

**Donna P.:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:06:55.12]

**Annemarie A.:** So, could you maybe, if you don't mind, describe some of the experiences of what it was like to kind of grow up in this era and integrate those schools?

[00:07:00.00]

**Donna P.:** You know, it's funny. Looking back, it was all I knew. It's been one of those things that you look back on, and I can piece together some of the things I do and some of the things I think, and some of the self-talk I still have to give myself that's based on having grown up there. After that, my father was the first—they were integrating Hickman, David Henry Hickman High School in Columbia, Missouri. It's the home of the Kewpies. And the Kewpies are those Kewpie dolls. However, once you go there—and I ended up going to that school, so that's where we stayed—once we go there, you love Kewpies. Sam Walton was a graduate. His family came from Columbia, and he was a graduate of Hickman. He was a Kewpie. There are quite a few people that are renowned that were Kewpies. But he, my dad, integrated Douglass, Frederick Douglass School. He came to work there, and then he went to Hickman. We were starting school, and I went to second grade to Grant School, U.S. Grant School. We were going to be the first blacks, my sister and myself. She was going to first grade. And it was, you know, after the 1954 decision, but it was a big deal. My parents really prepared us for it. My mother said—and there were a couple of things that stand out to me, looking back now. We were told that there might be things said to us, and to never let people show that it bothered us, and that we were there representing everybody. When we could do this, it would never have to be repeated again. We were doing something that, we were there to show people how we were—and Mom would always say, "You're better, but don't tell them that, either." But we had more education than most people; we had a lot more everything than most people. But she said, "You're there to fit in and to show people how you fit in, and to represent all the people that came before." When you look back, that's a really big order. [Laughter] So, when we came back from this integration, we—a couple of things, and I've seen that

recently, is that I learned really quickly that it hurt my mother so much to hear any negative stories that I never, I didn't want to repeat them. So, I never told her of the things that really happened, because I didn't want her to feel so worried and hurt. Then you internalize a lot of that, and that's, you know, that's something you have to work out later in your life. The other part that was confusing, there's another—oh, we lived on a street called Ash Street. It was segregated on the south side of the street, and integrated on the north. There was a little girl across the street who was an only child, Darlene Sutton, and she was my age exactly. There are four of us, I'm the oldest of four. We had this giant house and this giant yard and we played like crazy and we had the most fun. My dad built this great fence and all of this stuff. Darlene would sit on her front porch by herself, and her father owned a segregated restaurant. Her mother was a housewife, I think, and her aunt, though, owned the little market around the corner that everybody went to and we'd go and buy candy or we'd go and pick up things for Mom. It was called Trubie's Market, and Mrs. Trubie was a very nice lady, but they had these setups. And Darlene was in my class when I went to second grade at school. She couldn't play with us. She couldn't talk to us. She couldn't wave to us when we sat there, because her father and mother had this decision about black people. But at school, she said—we met the first day when we were there—she came up to me and she said, "You know, I can't do these things," she says, "but we can at school, we can be friends." And we were friends all of our life. I still remember, she, her birthday was April 23, and she and I celebrated at school and then we couldn't, you know—and she's passed away, and I think of her so dearly as this sincere little girl that had these things put on her the way they had been with me. The other person, when I got to school that first day of school and Mom and Dad, they had to both

be at school, so they couldn't take us. So this woman, Ms. Mamie, who was an elevator operator from our church, walked us to school. She didn't say anything. She said, "Whatever your parents told you, that's what you do." We walked to school and we came to our class, and my sister had this wonderful teacher. I had kind of a teacher who said—we learned later—she said, "I decided I had to do this because that's how I kept my job." She introduced me, and then this little group at recess came around and just kind of looked at me. This one little girl stepped forward and she says, "Hello, my name is Ann Garrett." And I still know Ann, or I've seen her at old reunions. She said, "My mother told me that I had to be nice to you, so come play." And looking back, that was a really brave thing for Ann Garrett to do, because she was the most popular. Her father was the doctor who became our doctor, and there was another girl whose uncle was the governor, and she was Ann's best friend, Debbie Patterson. So, that's who became my friends, so that was a, you know . . . but it was a strange thing. The last, strangest part of that integration, per se, and especially those young years, were watching my younger siblings having issues. That hurt even more than for me. The other one was in watching that . . . people treat my father differently than the respect that he deserved. There would be occasions when I would watch somebody do something dismissive to my father, and look for him to correct it, and he wouldn't. He would just stand there, because at that time, he couldn't. Lynchings were still happening in the world. The other thing is I remember, that was a part of that whole era—to finish this all off—was that all of these people, and I think even today, a lot of people will say, "I didn't realize that happened," or, "I didn't . . ."

" All of these people were very subservient-acting in life, peoples' housekeepers or people that worked in a store or all of those things, they would come to our house at night

to talk to my father to get advice and to tell him what was going on. They would come as the real people they were. So, I grew up with that double vision of these and people and my father saying, "Here's what you do, a, b, c, or let me call my attorney, or let me do this." But there was this double world, and that was my entry into the world, and it was that double world. Then, where food is concerned, people acted as if they'd never heard about any—even today, I still . . . for instance, I would talk, I had my thirteenth birthday. Mom said, "What would you want?" And invited kids from school, so it was almost all white. There were just a couple of black kids, 'cause there were no black middle class kids in our town, either. I wanted shrimp creole, which was my very favorite. So these two girls, that are still from my closest circle, had a bite or two and then they put it down and they said, "Um, our mother said that real ladies don't like spicy food." And I still make—and I add extra spice when I make it, just because I remember that. That's hurtful to a little, to a thirteen-year-old girl. That was the kind of, about anything. I read now these headlines, "Pickle juice adds so much to . . ." And I remember mentioning to people, "Oh, my goodness, how could you add that?" Or any kind of dish. There were some dishes that we never—oh. We'd go shopping at the grocery store, and my mother was always this representative of everything. We could not even look at a watermelon. We could not even—at any of the things that were part of that racist kind of thought, we could not even do. She would say, "Girls, come right here." And so, that's all the residual, that's of having that early in your life. You realize, when you raise your own children, how important childhood is to forming some of the things.

[00:16:37.06]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah. That sounds like it was really challenging.

[00:16:40.15]

**Donna P.:** Yeah, it was. And it was an imprint that gets made on you, where you see the world differently that way.

[00:16:49.00]

**Annemarie A.:** Definitely. Could you talk a little bit more about kind of the food that you guys ate growing up? Because your mom had this really, really robust knowledge of this really great Gulf South cuisine. Could you talk about maybe some of the things that she made and how she kind of adjusted to living in the Midwest and finding those ingredients?

[00:17:11.01]

**Donna P.:** Right. Well, what was so funny was that my mom, of course, the center of our existence, my grandmother's creole in the center, was gumbo. So when my grandparents, my paternal, my dad's parents, would come up on the train—we would call them Gran and Pops—and they would come up in their private car on the train, and they would bring an ice chest filled with frozen shrimp, 'cause we could not find. All that we could—I remember going, another girl who couldn't play with me's father was the butcher at the A&P, Marsha. I remember, all they had were these nasty—in the middle of Missouri, there's nothing—little shrimp. Mom would try to make stuff with it, but you really couldn't. They would bring this shrimp up, and they would bring Gulf oysters. My mother was just like, crying when she would see all this stuff. They would bring the hot sausage,

which is very similar to smoked Spanish chorizo, was what the creole sausages that they would bring up. Big ice chest, as much as they possibly could. My parents, my mother, would really limit us to a little taste, because they wanted it for themselves, you know. [Laughter] They would make oyster loaves, which are, oysters are my very favorite. Gulf oysters in an oyster loaf or raw or any way done is just my dream come true. Shrimp creole, fried shrimp, jambalaya. All the dishes were. And, those were the cheap dishes when they were growing up. I talk about the bananas. I have this strong feeling that a lot of these delicious banana desserts came from the Gulf Coast because the banana boats would come up to Mobile and drop the ripe bananas like dirt, and they were free. So, my grandmother always had millions of bananas that were ripening, so she made banana bread almost every day, practically. And gumbo was cheap, just the way lobster was on the East Coast. Gumbo was all the stuff you could just go and find. So, those were there. Now, when we went to school, Grant School, trying very hard, learning that our role was to fit in, the biggest dish there was chili. My mother had never had chili. And it was chili, and they served it with peanut butter sandwiches. So, the Grant School—we didn't know any better. [Laughter] We were . . . so we came home and we wanted Mom to make chili with peanut butter sandwiches. My mom was just like, "Oh, my God." But she made it. [Laughter] She had the Better Homes & Gardens cookbook, she looked all these things up and she made it. To this day, I love peanut butter with chili. That's how I grew up. It was with peanut butter sandwiches on a white bread. I'll do a brioche, but we chili con carne. She adapted. She learned how to—she didn't make any of those kinds of . . . she did chicken, and she would do, 'cause we had chicken in our gumbo, and she would do fried, she knew how to make fried . . . But I think some of these things she learned from

Dalton when she was there with the ladies that cooked there for us. But she loved, she loved everything about food. She's the one who understood, I mean, she adored cooking, she adored food. We would go to school, my mother was a first grade teacher at the very beginning when we were little. She made a hot meal for breakfast every day for four children and her husband. She loved everything about recipes and dishes, and then, the story, my favorite, in 1996 I went to the first—my food seminars, when people were moving from Home Ec. teachers to when journalists were writing about food. It used to be that it was all Home Ec. teachers and things, and then real journalists were writing. A hundred of us were invited to come to the Greenbrier, and we sat in this room and went around, introduced ourselves. One lady said, "Hello, my name is Julia Child, and I am here, I write about food." She was all of ours, we had all grown up knowing about her. I brought my mother the next year for vacation, and my mother had said to me, "No, don't you dare become a food journalist." She said, "That's . . . not, we've been in food all of our lives as black people. We've always been the chefs and the cooks and whatever." She said, "Your writing—fashion is fine. You're writing about fashion, you're writing about business." And I was a business journalist, and she said, "Don't you dare." So I came out of one of the sessions and my mom is sitting there, and she's talking to Julia Child and she's talking about gumbo. That evening, at dinner, my mom said, "You know, this food thing you're talking about writing?" She goes, "That might be okay." And from then on, she was my biggest fan and my biggest supporter. I always, when I see Julia Child's picture, I always go, "Thank you," 'cause I don't think I could have made it through without my mom being on my team.

[00:22:39.23]

**Annemarie A.:** That's so great. For the record, could you tell us your mother and father's names?

[00:22:43.26]

**Donna P.:** Yes. Elliott and Muriel Battle, Ba-t-t-l-e. My mother was Muriel Williams Battle, and my parents were amazing, amazing, courageous, smart people. All four of us laugh when we say, we look at them and people say—I have a brother who's a physician and sister who's an attorney, and that's the other reason I got to be a journalist, because we got that taken care of before me. [Laughter] We always say, "We should have all been president, with these people for parents." Because they were, they were amazing. And they loved us. They put us first in their lives. My mother ended up, she had started as a teacher, became the first black principal of the . . . school that was on the west side of Columbia, which was where everybody was moving and then became assistant superintendent and then superintendent of schools. When she passed away in 2003, the new school that came along they were going to name the Elliott and Muriel Battle School after them because they had done so much, so much for education and for all. And yet my dad was still alive, and there was a rule that you couldn't name it after a living person. So, they named it after my mother, the Muriel Battle—thirty-seven million dollar high school. My father passed away a few years later, and they named the elementary school nearby after my dad. So, there are two schools named after them. They had planned, originally, to go to Columbia and then move to California, to move to Northern California where their siblings had moved, their sister and brother-in-law, but decided to say. They said, "Our

work is here." Every time we'd beg them, 'cause I was not a fan, you know, growing up, of some of the things that happened there. They'd say, "This is where we're supposed to do our work." They knew it, and they did great work.

[00:24:56.20]

**Annemarie A.:** That's amazing.

[00:25:00.11]

**Donna P.:** They were amazing. Yeah.

[00:25:03.13]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great.

[00:25:05.11]

**Donna P.:** [Laughter]

[00:25:06.23]

**Annemarie A.:** Could we talk a little bit about your education? What got you interested in journalism, where'd you start out?

[00:25:11.13]

**Donna P.:** From day one. When we were little, on that house on Ash Street across from Darlene, we were all upstairs and we only had each other to play with. We didn't have other

friends that we played with. So, we all had our businesses in our bedrooms. [Laughter] My sister who's the lawyer was the banker, 'cause she's good with money, too. My other sister would have, would sell things. She would sell earrings. And she's the person who loves to shop, and her husband opened up quite a few McDonald's franchises, and they did very well that way. My brother did sports, and he would do things with sports, the one who became the physician. He was kind of the little kid that did that. I wrote the paper, and so, from day one, I kept a diary all my life, I loved everything about writing. And I loved everything about—now, my grandfather, my great-grandfather had been the physician in Mobile. His son had worked for him, and he had a pharmacy and a medical practice, but his son published a black newspaper. But he died before I was born, but I have this picture in my office, and I feel like there must have been something, some gene somehow, that got wacky about that. And Columbia, with the University of Missouri Journalism School, was—journalism was always so highly thought of. My friends' parents, I had some who were journalists, and reading, I would never have survived childhood without reading. I read voraciously, and I still do. I still love books. We were talking about the library. Libraries, for me, I can walk into—I can walk into one anywhere in the world, and there's something about home that I feel. And there's something about seeing all the books. There's something, too, about seeing library patrons, that we share in common. There's something about other people who love books that you feel this camaraderie with. So, there was never a question that I was going to be anything else—to me. My grandmother, my paternal grandmother, had thought she was brainwashing me, and she said, "You need to be an anesthesiologist." I can still hear her telling me this. "Because that way, you can also be a mother and you can set your hours

and you don't have to do emergency—" [Laughter] So, I always felt bad. She was kind of always pretty mad that I never became one. [Laughter] But, I knew I had to do that. Then, the food part, though, only came after a trip to Europe. I realized that it was in the [19]80s, 1982, spent almost a year just traveling through Europe. I realized that food was so much more than food, and it was the first time. It was the first time for me that I had ever, ever in my life, not been a black American. It was the first time people called me an American. It was so shocking and strange, 'cause I had grown up in this culture and in this country where that was always the first descriptor of me. There, it was always, "Oh, you Americans," or, "You that." And then it was always people sharing their food stories. Watching people who treated food so much, with so much more respect than we were at that time in the United States. I remember this old lady in the winter, New Year's, shopping for a special kind of cherries and cheese that were preserved in the little market. She was obviously very poor and using her important money to buy this. Then, there were the girls in Berlin that we met on the train with your rail—everybody was there travelling. On our way to Copenhagen, and they said, "When you get to, if you come back, stop in Berlin, stay with us." I was going, "Oh, no, I'm going to definitely do Italy as much as I can, and France, those are my places." She said, "Oh, no, you come." And we stopped. We took the ferry over from Copenhagen and it was, the Wall was still up. We got off the ferry and had to go through. They wouldn't let us go straight to the train. We had to walk a few blocks in East Berlin, and there were people, it looked like the 1940s. There were people that were dressed in clothes like you see in photographs from the [19]40s on street cars. They were looking at us and we were looking at them. There was only one other American, a young man who won *Jeopardy!* and he was on there on

our train, the three Americans. My friend and I were travelling, and this young man. They ushered us through, down whatever, and there was the passports shown to get into West Berlin. We got into, and the one to America was so, the line was so quickly, and the one for anyone else who didn't have an American passport just went on for miles. I remember, it was a term during, I remember thinking that I was happy to be an American. It was during a time when I was questioning a lot of that. And that was, for me, a reminder that this is what I—this is, bloom where you're planted. This is what I have and let me appreciate. We went and got to **Monika's** house and Berlin was amazing. I'd never even heard. Our history is so . . . our history is so missing in so many ways, about black history and about other countries. It's so pushed around. Berlin was the most amazing city. The **cadavie**, I still remember this from way back then, and I have not been back to Berlin. The top floor of the grocery store was all food markets. Amazing food markets. We'd get to Monika's house and she invited her friends all over to meet the Americans. They were interested and curious for our American part, not our black American part. They each brought family dishes and we sat and we talked and we laughed. We talked about families and we talked about what the food meant and how you made the different things. Somebody made the toast, "The Wall would not be out here if people, the real people in the world, could sit around tables and share their families' food and their families' stories." And that was, there was like a bell that went off for me. That was the beginning of my decision to say, to steer my career to write about, to understand there was value in food. It was important. I wanted to write about it. I wanted other people to appreciate it. I felt like I had been given so many different kind of experiences; I lived in San Francisco for fifteen years and all of these things. I wanted to share that, and I

wanted to share that dinner in Berlin in other ways. 'Cause they're those kind of dinners we have all the time, and they're family dinners. And to appreciate it before it was too late to appreciate it.

[00:33:12.19]

**Annemarie A.:** Definitely. That sounds really amazing. Could you talk a little about—I want to backtrack—

[00:33:18.06]

**Donna P.:** Yeah, sure.

[00:33:20.01]

**Annemarie A.:** So we can get into Chicago. But where was the first job that you had out of journalism school, and what did you do?

[00:33:33.00]

**Donna P.:** I was actually . . . well, my part-time jobs growing up and doing that, I was always in retail and I always knew clothes. You know, I'm fashion and food, so I could have gone either way, fashion and food. But the food drew me in. But I always worked in women's shops. My first job was in, I was a manager. I managed store, women's fashion stores. I still adore fashion, and I still love following it. Then I owned my own business, and I had—right after the trip to Europe, I decided to have a son, our child. We opened, there were no cool maternity stores, so I opened a very cool maternity store in San Francisco

and did that and had that for . . . and then opened one in Beverly Hills, so was able to really travel and do that kind of stuff. And then to travel back to Europe and be able to spend time eating and with food. But the food, you're asking about how it slipped in or how, my job and food?

[00:34:54.01]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah, okay. When did you—one more clarifying question. You mentioned that you were a business journalist, too. When did you do that?

[00:35:01.27]

**Donna P.:** Oh, right. In Missouri, I had graduated from . . . actually from Stephens in fashion and journalism. I went to work for *Mid-Missouri Business Journal* and wrote about businesses. Then, when I was in San Francisco and with all of that and with my son—divorced from his dad—and coming back to Missouri, 'cause I wanted him to have that stability of these amazing grandparents and what I knew. Even though the hardest thing I ever did was leave California, leave San Francisco and L.A., but even though I wanted him, I knew that that was important. I came back to Columbia, talked, spoke with the editor of the *Columbia Tribune, Columbia Daily Tribune*. I said I had a friend, **Sherry Catch**, who was the features editor. I said, "I want to be your food editor." He said, "No, we have a features—" There was a job opening, she had told me. I said, "Okay. The only way I'll take your features editor and write about all the features is if you can separate the job, and I can be the features editor and the food editor. But I want to be the food editor."

And he gave me that and permission. I started a weekly column, and that first year, my weekly column won a national award.

[00:36:37.10]

**Annemarie A.:** That's awesome.

[00:36:40.15]

**Donna P.:** I wrote about, "The Flavors of Home" was the name of it. I wrote about, it was long before people started doing blog stuff or doing, and I wrote about just food and raising a little boy and what it meant to me and what it was like. People, it was so wonderful, 'cause I felt the closeness to the readers, and they felt that to me. I look back on it, I save those columns. And I own the copyright to it, so none of it's been really printed from those old columns. So, that's been good. But I knew then that it was more than a job. This was how I wanted to live my life, and I wanted it to be—I did reviews, and I did all of that stuff. I just wanted it to be about bringing all of that together, 'cause that's how I had been raised, and it made sense.

[00:37:31.17]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah. Could you talk a little bit about the responsibilities of what it's like to be a food editor?

[00:37:37.20]

**Donna P.:** Yeah. It's interesting now, 'cause I'm about to do, I'm moderating a panel at the Association of Food Journalists, and that's where I'd won the award, in Napa. It was amazing. But one of the things is that journalism, and now we're facing bloggers and influencers and all of that, but it's very different, because journalism is about the truth and about saying it from a point that's not being influenced by advertisers and all of that. We are really at a point now where most of the food writing, quote, is done by people who are paid by Nestle or getting things from all of these people so that they will write positive things. And journalists, still, are people that operate as journalists with those kinds of rules. The other thing that was important to me about it was to make sure the recipes work. And there are tons of recipes on the web, and all of them do not work. A lot of them are not tested recipes. So, for me, that's the other major ingredient. When I went on to Chicago, to the *Chicago Tribune*, to be able to write as a journalist and then to be able, as a test kitchen director, that was both of my responsibilities. I guess I've always had this double play; almost like . . . it is also important that the recipes worked intricately. I mean, that you went through and you said, "Now, is this cinnamon right or do you do this or do you—" And back in the day when there was a lot more money to have that time, those are bulletproof recipes. That, to me, is still important, that when I publish recipes, those are recipes that work and that also guide people in a certain way, that you're able to guide a person who is a beginning cook, also a person who is an experienced cook will be interested. It's written in that way. The format that I love using is the one I learned that's the original kind of food journalism of the ingredients and how they're listed. All of those things are done in a style. It's a specific style of writing a recipe. The book that I'm working on now, I'm translating some old recipes that are great.

I have discovered some of the greatest recipes on earth, but they're written in a narrative—in a paragraph. So, that paragraph needs to be translated. For me, it's great, 'cause I've got nieces and nephews and I've got a son who's cooking, quote, cooking. [Laughter] So, I need to do it so that he can understand what that means, you know? When he resisted, when he was growing up, 'cause I was a very—ingredients are crucial. Good ingredients are the crucial part to it, and I get so, even with some of these older recipes, you go through periods of the [19]50s where there were soups added or there were this added. And I'm bringing it back to make sure it's just pure, good ingredients. When you do that, you've got the head start on everything. But then, the right amounts and the right balances. But he used to come home and—this is the way he would rebel against his mother. He would say, "Mom, I feel the need for preservatives." [Laughter] So now, he's in San Diego. Now, he's cooking, and he does the sendaway kits. But that's wonderful, and I've learned that it's up to me to adapt to what younger people are doing the way that I want to appreciate a few—you don't have to do every one on earth, but a few of their old recipes, take that with you. And also, for me, to appreciate some of the shortcuts that are out there. Spice blends, for instance. Are there really good spice blends? Sure. Rather than have a million things. And I've developed ones you can make, like, once every two months and there're tons of those recipes out there. But just to have the quality ingredients.

[00:41:59.29]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great. How long were you at the *Columbia Tribune*?

[00:42:04.00]

**Donna P.:** I was there, let's see. I was there from . . . I was there for about three years, and then I wanted, I had so many offers to do for freelance things, I wanted to go freelance. And then the *Missourian*, the University of Missouri J-School came to me, Dean Mills, who said, "I'm a fan of yours, and I think you're an excellent journalist." He wanted me to help with some of the young, beginning journalists that were there, journalists who wanted to write about food as well as with the University of Missouri newspaper, the *Missourian*. I had grown up with both. Those, to me, that was writing for the *Times*. You know, I had grown up, those were the places I loved. I knew the old writers, the old columnists. So, I went there in . . . I think it was 2000 or . . . I was there for eighteen months, and then the *Chicago Tribune* had read what I did, and I got an e-mail one day that said, "Would you be interested in coming to work for the *Chicago Tribune*?" I tell people, "That computer's still on and the mouse is dangling from the desk 'cause I said, 'yes!'" That was my move, I came in 2002 to Chicago. And what I wanted, the reason was, I loved Chicago. I'd travelled all my life back and forth and the restaurants and all. I also wanted that to reach an audience, another audience. I felt like my message is so important, about sharing family recipes, about not making the whole Food Network, chef-y game, because I know . . . I feel that there's a lot of that that's very commercial. Everything has become—but this is not all about that. This is about the simplicity of family cooking, and the fact that these, some of the secrets, they're not secrets. Cooks are dwindling in numbers in that way, people that do the old ways. We don't need to have secrets; we have to help each other do our best work.

[00:44:34.12]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great. How did you kind of combat that? 'Cause I mean, Chicago's a big city and it's full of lots of working people. So in what ways did you try to push these older recipes and that—

[00:44:50.04]

**Donna P.:** Well, that was interesting, too, because I have this thing—this is my favorite story that I ever wrote, because I started in Chicago to realize how badly . . . first of all, the difference between Southern food as it was being portrayed and the fact that so many blacks were left out of that narrative, and still are. And so many contributions that should be highlighted have been left out of the history of food. And that there's some separations, like that pickle juice that's shocking to white writers, or the bacon grease on top of the stove. I begged my mother to take it off the top of our stove because my white friends ridiculed it. So, all of those things, I wanted to make sure and bring us to the forefront. At the Tribune, we used to have these amazing meetings. And I had to write about everything. And I love every culture; I love anybody who comes from anywhere. I love writing about their family story, from Appalachia—I love anybody talking about their life through their food. To me, that resonates. But especially, and the fact that it was so absent with blacks. And the fact that going back through the archives, it was always, "Hey, hey, hey, look at this soul food." And it was not respected the way other food was respected. So I, for the Juneteenth story—and this, still, is the favorite thing I ever did—we'll have a meeting with the photographers and with the photo staff. The test kitchen was off of the photo lab, so I knew them very well. I said, "I want this to be respectful. I

want respect in your head with every step of the photographs. And I want this to show what it means to me and what it means to every black person, the respect in this." We met with the designer, and I said, "I want this designed with respect." We met with the food stylist. So, everything about this was so well-thought out. Then I went and found a man who had been part of, who had ridden by on a wagon with his grandfather back in Texas for a Juneteenth celebration who lived now in Chicago as a businessman, and interviewed him, and another woman who had come. It all came together. It was the most beautiful story to me on earth. It still is. I'm showing you a picture, but if you see that, look how beautiful. And the inside is just the same way. And this was down by the river. Even though you don't see the river, there's something about the fact this is by the river. It's just all of it. It's what it's supposed to be. So, the next year, when it came around, I said, "I want to do the Juneteenth story." And my editor said, "You did one last year." I said, "We did July 4 last year, too." And I realized, "You know what? I need to focus. How much time do I have as a journalist? I need to focus on black contributions, black culinary contributions. I need to bring back people who are almost lost." That's when I began to know that, even no matter what it took—and I felt that, I felt that passion, I felt that strength. I knew I was being directed. "I need to . . ." And then even with Southern Foodways, you know. I brought this, there was an article from Mobile that was written about the . . . a restaurant in Mobile that is a real country, you know, whatever—Wintzell's. There's no mention of the fact that the man who built this building, the man who, was my great-grandfather. And that building still stands, and the photograph of both of my great-grandfathers had a part in that building and a part in that history. Wintzell's recognizes it, but it wasn't even in Southern Foodways. I realized that, and it's not, I

realize that it's not from negativity, it's from people not understanding. It's from a history that wasn't told so that people understand, not only is there a black upper middle-class that's been there forever in every city in America, and that's the story I have to tell, as well, but there's also, dig deeper than just going to the white face behind a counter. Dig deeper and go where to that came from. Don't be surprised when there is a strong, intelligent—I have a picture of that, of the man who owned that, who was sitting next to Booker T. Washington, who was a friend of his. So all of that, to me, was what I have to tell. Even now, as I'm coming to this point, the book that I'm working on, as I'm coming to this point, I realize I have to also find the people to pass this on to so that they can start at this point telling the same story. And making sure that our books, and even conferences and even organizations, understand there is a richness that's still left out, and it's just beginning. Michael Twitty, I applauded him. We all did a, Michael and Tony and we all did a workshop together several years ago. We were beginning to do this. I was writing to someone, I said, "Everybody else did their books." I said, "Now it's time for mine to come." And that other part of it with the black middle class, and what that means in food.

[00:50:35.03]

**Annemarie A.:** That's so great. This is kind of connected to what you're talking about with this Juneteenth article and then other ways of trying to inject this richness back into the history that's kind of omitted. How did your readership, how did they respond to that? How did they respond to what you decided to write?

[00:50:59.06]

**Donna P.:** Everybody . . . everybody was surprised. And that's the part that shouldn't be.

Everybody was surprised about, and including the founders of Southern Foodways, at the very beginning of it: surprised that there was this amazing channel and strong channel of people that, I want to just show you. This is my aunt, who was a poet who wrote a poetry book. So, this is my grandmother. This is my great-great-grandmother, and the joke was that she was passing for black. [Laughter] And my mom graduating from school. These are amazing photos—and this was normal, and this is normal all over. This is my favorite thing; this was a women's group in the [19]30s, and this is Mom speaking to them. I'm writing about this, about Montana, there's a banner with Montana. But this was not unusual, and everybody acts like it's unusual, and that's why I want to make—this is the handsome guy that became my dad. Isn't—the principal of all of that. With Freda and with *EBONY* and all of that, she had the image of the little brown chef, and that was my uncle who created that, who became . . . so all of those things, to me, were an important part. And these people that are just amazing, I guess I—just amazing photographs of people that were behind harps or doing this or in symphony orchestras. Here's a woman. You know, these are all real photographs of people that you know, and that we knew and family friends, and that every black person, there's so many—know that they're all over the country. Yet I think part of that division, Trump has been really helpful to me, because he reminds me of the mindset I grew up with, where people acted as if they were able to justify that we were different. We were always told, "You're a special family. You're a different family." No. We were not. There were millions like us, black people everywhere. I have an uncle, great-uncle who was a New York Supreme Court judge. I

mean, there are so many families who can say that who just stop saying it. We were told not to say it, because it was—we had to get through this so that the people, my friend whose dad was the butcher at A&P, you know, I could still be able to sit in class. That's why, for me, bringing that food together and realizing that the story tells a story of a whole group of people that have also been underrepresented, just like all of the chefs. I'm writing about the couple that had a, in Wisconsin, had a television cooking show in the [19]50s, a black couple. Nobody knows about. You know? And the Montana cookbook from the [19]20s, so.

[00:54:33.09]

**Annemarie A.:** That's so cool. I guess going along with this, so, you mentioned there are lots of articles, you wrote one on N.P.R. and you've talked on radio about Freda DeKnight. Could you talk a little bit about her relationship with your family and kind of what an inspiration she was for you?

[00:54:56.00]

**Donna P.:** Well, I did not know her. My grandmothers both knew her. She was a woman whose—in fact, I did a fellowship, the Nieman at Harvard. I would sit in the Schlesinger Library and go back through the archives. And I would read these archived stories that are just buried in an archive somewhere, and I read the story about a woman from the [19]30s in Iowa, and she was me. She had exactly—she came from the family that I came from. She came from parents who both were college graduates. She came from loving food. She came from travelling in Europe. She came from all of these things, and this

woman, who's no named. Nobody even knows about, I'm mentioning her in the book, but that was me. And I realized that, and this is Iowa. Everybody acts like—when I first started coming to Southern Foodways, people were saying that Missouri, that wasn't Southern food, what . . . and actually, I grew up in, it's called the Little Dixie of Missouri. That's because there were people that were enslaved; they didn't have to migrate there. There was slavery in Missouri. And there were plantations in Missouri. Freda's family had come from, her mother had come from the East Coast. Her father had come from the South, and he was a Pullman. He worked for the Pullman Corporation, and he was a porter in Kansas. She was born on the train. She and her mother were taking the train to get back to their home, and that's where—her mother was taking the train to get back quickly to have her baby—and she was born on the train. Her father died when she was a little girl, and her mother brought her to South Dakota. Freda was raised in South Dakota with a family of caterers, black caterers who were famous, who knew all of these amazing recipes and catered all these—and it wasn't just caterers who were cooks. These were caterers who did all the big events. So, she did that, and was raised in the way of integrating everything. I so identified with her, and my grandmothers would talk about, that was the only cookbook. The black cookbook. A lot of the others had black faces on them or whatever, but they were not intended for black writers and whatever. Freda's whole thing was, "By us, for us." That's her book. My grandmothers loved her recipes. There are recipes I thought were family recipes that were Freda's recipes that they did from—they loved her, and they loved her . . . she travelled, she spent a lot of time in Europe. She was married to a musician who was college-educated, and that was an important reference, I guess, in a lot of families. She loved fashion. And so, growing up, I

would hear stories about her, and I totally identified with. And see photographs with my grandmothers and stuff, and I just said, "This is the woman." You know? So she's what kept me going when I knew that was kind of the direction of—and even when I moved from my direction of fashion and business to food, Freda was there on my shoulder, saying, "You can do it." That's why I want other people to understand. And that it's not just, ta-da or let's be funny or let's be jivey or whatever. It's a gracious, intelligent woman from a very—as they used to say in the old days, cultured background, and that's who she was.

[00:58:49.21]

**Annemarie A.:** She seems like it.

[00:58:51.13]

**Donna P.:** And she was a great cook and she has great, great recipes.

[00:58:54.13]

**Annemarie A.:** That's awesome. Speaking of recipes, could you talk a little bit about what it takes to run a test kitchen?

[00:59:02.08]

**Donna P.:** Yes. Well, it takes—number one. The *Tribune* one was a standard of the test kitchen. When I first, I used to get so upset until I started photographing food, about how long the designer took. [Laughter] The stylist took to style food, because it would take sometimes

half a day. It would be things with tweezers to move the olive to be a certain way to do that. I still, Maya Angelou—that's what I do want to share, too. Maya Angelou's the other person on the other shoulder with me. There's a story about her that really helped me, helped me decide I had to write about black people. But Maya Angelou's books, she would not let stylists style the recipes. And I don't believe in it. I believe in arranging it nicely, but I do not believe in using the tweezers and the olive and whatever to make it look the way some of the, even the fast food restaurants when those sandwiches don't look anything like the ones that you're gonna buy. That this should be approachable; people should feel that this looks like the one that I just made. You can do beautiful food shots without them having to be—those are my collard greens. These are mine. This is my food shot here. And the gumbo and all those things; those aren't styled. They're put together nicely, but they're not styled the way you pay a food stylist to style that. These are all, and I learned so much from the test kitchen in terms of putting recipes together in order of when the ingredients are used. And the amounts, how to write amounts of recipes. How to discard—if it's not going to work, it's not going to work, and not to push it or whatever to make that happen. How to make it approachable for a family cook so that they can reproduce it in their own kitchen. When can you use a substitute? When do you say, "Do not substitute this?" But it's really great, if you can, throw out things that can be substituted. For me, one of my non-negotiables is mace, which is the spice mace, which is an old Southern way. The outside covering of nutmeg, and it adds something that you cannot get anywhere else. And however, it's harder and harder and harder and more expensive to get, because companies are deciding they don't have to use it. That's how we evolve out of tastes sometimes. I watched my son with, there was a dish that he

ate the way that it was modern and not the old way. I—lemonade. Lemonade. I grew up with my mother's lemonade that she would squeeze the lemons, added the sugars, put the **quarters** in, and that was what lemonade tastes like. My son, I bought lemonade, and I bought the ones that were, you know, in the cartons and I bought all this kind. He likes lemonade. And one day, I made him—I said, "This is special, I'm going to make—" And he went, "Eww!" And I realized, that's how we change our tastes. I'm the one who changed his taste to that kind of lemonade, away from real lemonade. And that was the same with, when he was born in San Francisco, my mother said, "Unless a child gets to learn to love grits before they're two, they're not gonna love grits." So I made it a point. He had grits every day, the minute he started eating solid, it was grits, and he loves grits. It was because he had that. I wanted him to have that Southern infusion in his life. And he loves, he doesn't eat seafood, but he loves gumbo and it has shrimp in it. [Laughter]

[01:03:12.27]

**Annemarie A.:** You did your job.

[01:03:15.17]

**Donna P.:** I did my job. I stand up for that, right.

[01:03:17.25]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great. I think we've been dancin' around this a little bit, but I want to ask you—and I read an article that you were interviewed for the, A.J. Miller had written in 2016 about Southern food versus soul food. But what is your definition of Southern food,

especially with this idea of, like, people kind of separating the two, Southern food and soul food? I use that kind of loosely as, kind of, like, in air quotes. Could you talk a little bit about what you see Southern food as?

[01:03:50.00]

**Donna P.:** Sure. For one thing, what I grew up eating was not called soul food. It was called soul food in the [19]60s, and that was kind of a thing as part of the Black Power movement and all of that. And I agree with it. I take that on and I love the term soul food, because for me, soul food, the fact is that we, as a people and as a culture, contributed and actually created what is known as Southern food. One of the things that, first just—oh, before I could do any of this writing, the reason my writing is coming to fold so late, I had to get rid of so much of my anger. 'Cause I had a lot of anger and resentment that probably stemmed to the time of integration, that I was just so angry about things, I couldn't truly—so I've been working so hard at getting rid of some of that anger and just to report the truth and to report that there are things people didn't understand that they were saying or passing on. But it was certainly hurtful to people like myself when they did. One of those, whenever I read, "The first mention of shrimp and grits was from the cookbook printed in 1828" or the Southern cookbook. It was illegal for blacks to learn to read and write. So, of course it was not written by a black person, because it was not legal for most black people to read and write at that time when these people were printing or writing these cookbooks. Most of these cookbooks, when you go back and research the people that did it, had cooks, and those cooks were the ones who—and I always think of those ladies and men who would come late at night and talk to my father. These were

people that were, "Oh, yes," and "You go right ahead," and "Here's this," because this was their livelihood. But the truth of the matter they would come and say: "Do you know what they're making me do? Do you know what's happening? They're taking—" And that's how recipes were taken. It's one thing, too, that—and people for so long, as the history of Southern food has been reported, for so long, it's been reported as fact that, if people go back and just do a cursory study, they will just go this white route of it without bringing in the people, even the Fredas and so many others. That's what we are all bringing to light now, those people who created, who brought together foods from—and some of them even by way of the Caribbean or by way of different ways. Spice blends together and things that you—you know, gumbo. So, those things all have those roots. They've been said, many ways, that to me—Southern food, to me, is a cultural food that was most contributed by black people, by African Americans. It's funny, I was just writing about why I use that term as well. I grew up at the time—in Freda's time was all Negro. And right around the time when soul food was coming, it became—and I had to make a choice about using black or African American. And I remember, and I just wrote about this, I was writing to an editor. I specifically chose to use African American only because it could be capitalized. And the A.P. said that black was not. I felt that my race should be capitalized. So, black to me is a much better representation; if there's supposed to be one, than African American, because there's are lots of different, you know. I used African American because I wanted to capitalize. Now, I capitalize Black, and it's acceptable. You can do that by choice. But that's an important little thing that most people don't think about, and I understand, if you were not—there are things, I'm sure, that are Hungarian that I don't understand, or Polish. Growing up or being in Chicago

now with so much Polish culture, and realizing there were little bitty things that were done to people.

[01:08:36.29]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah. That's really powerful. So, how long were you at Chicago, at the *Tribune*?

[01:08:45.06]

**Donna P.:** I was there for, I think, about . . . little under ten years.

[01:08:51.18]

**Annemarie A.:** Okay. So, after you were at the *Tribune*, did you start working at the *Chicago Defender*?

[01:08:58.18]

**Donna P.:** I started doing—I did stuff with B.E.T., I did stuff with *Upscale* magazine, I was a contributing editor. I did stuff with everybody, if it was black. I did everything black. That was where I realized that that was where I was supposed to go, and that I was supposed to bring people with me, and I was supposed to be there as—and I offer that all the time, when I meet young black journalists, and I'll say to them . . . there are things that I have, either going to leave to archives, some of them I will. It's not going to be left to family. And either to archives to have a person who is feeling that same thing to give them that head start. That was Maya Angelou for me. [Inaudible 01:09:52], I had interviewed her for a story that was when she was coming up, right before she passed

away, a few years. I went over to—she was staying at a hotel on State Street. She was staying at the Embassy Suites. And we had a room like this; we had a little private room at the Embassy Suites, and we talked. She was lovely and wonderful. I had met her years before and she remembered. I had been a Black Studies major for a year at Indian University, and my professor, who's one of my mentors, Mari Evans, who's a poet and all, had invited those of us—there were eight of us, for lunch at the Union with Maya Angelou. I had just been . . . I had said, "We have so much in common." She goes, "Really? What do we have in common?" I said, "Well, we're both from Missouri." 'Cause she had grown up, she had been born, or grown up, in Missouri. I said, "We love food," and da da da. This was before she'd written her cookbook. Then her answer to me, which I really loved, she goes, "You certainly have a lot of confidence, don't you?" [Laughter] Which I adored. I reminded her of that when we were having this, I was at the Chicago Tribune interviewing her. She said, "How are you doing?" She said, "Are you—" I explained my frustration and I explained how my troubles with . . . decisions that were being made sometimes not to include blacks in a certain way or not to always go after that angle. She said—she sent her assistant. We were just the two of us and she called her assistant. She said, "Go up and get this poem for me." And she brought down the poem. And the poem was about that. And then she said, "You're supposed to do what you're doing for black people, and you're going to do it." And she said, "Just know that there are going to be times when you're going to have to tell people know, and there are times when you're going to have to rock some boats." She said, "But, you're going to do this, and I'm looking forward to reading what you do." And I always feel her, too, when I . . . I

want to be that. I want to say that and help that with somebody, until our story is completely out there.

[01:12:18.12]

**Annemarie A.:** That's awesome.

[01:12:19.09]

**Donna P.:** So. I think I'm . . . I remember you saying that . . .

[01:12:25.26]

**Annemarie A.:** Oh, we can go for longer.

[01:12:27.09]

**Donna P.:** I know, but I don't necessarily want to. [Laughter]

[01:12:28.26]

**Annemarie A.:** Okay. Well, I have a couple more questions to ask you, then.

[01:12:33.09]

**Donna P.:** Okay.

[01:12:34.16]

**Annemarie A.:** So you worked for the *Chicago Defender*, which is a really historic paper, and—

[01:12:38.01]

**Donna P.:** Okay.

[01:12:43.14]

**Annemarie A.:** And so also, you wrote the syndicated column for that, you wrote the **Cook's End** in *EBONY*, could you talk a little bit about writing for that, and what you wrote?

[01:12:51.01]

**Donna P.:** Well, first of all, the difference in writing for black people versus writing for a mainstream white, quote, mainstream white audience, is just like a dream come true. Everybody's hungry for this information that's coming in. The things that I had to tiptoe around when I wrote for white papers, everybody understands, "Yeah, that's right." And are anxious to do that. So that was just more confirmation to me that there were people hungry for this information, hungry for these words, and that there were so many people out there that just the way things are coming out now and people are so excited to see it, there's a whole amazing market that I'd always been told didn't exist that truly exists. And so that, to me, was important. Also, the shaking hands back to the people that came before, including my grandfather's paper, and going back through and reading these things and realizing that they were specifically kept out of the mainstream. In fact, one of the things about history—and that people don't know, people that thought they were bringing black history out in these different organizations and groups—one of the things people don't understand is that, in society pages, in all of these things, blacks were not

allowed to appear in Missouri growing up. My articles about my parents that were social articles were on either classified or were police reports or whatever, or did not appear at all. So many stories I'm researching, I have to go to black newspapers to find. That was not just because there were—black newspapers were still vibrant and black funeral homes because the other places would not let us in. So, that meant our story did not get told. That meant that we were told that the first time the recipe for macaroni and cheese appeared, it was here or there, and not our contribution to it. Even, I'm writing about the first black graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, the C.I.A., and how the chefs refused to acknowledge some of the stuff that he brought through, and yet would come and talk to him and try to get his recipes afterwards. That's the kind of, that's culturally, where we—and we've not been able to, until now, and now it's really something that's interesting and out there. But working for black, to me, black press has been really wonderful. The *Defender* was not, when I came to it, I only did it because it was the *Defender*, and because I had a cousin who had been an editor to another cousin, Charles Davis. So, the *Defender* now—these things are all kind of channeled through differently, but I wanted, a hundred years from now, to have some things and to be able to say the *Defender* on there. I felt that the people that were there before me, the way I do at family reunions. You feel all of the ancestors that came before you that you didn't know, and you know they only stayed alive—or, like my father, they only tolerated someone being patronizing to them in front of their children so you could live to be here. So, I want to make that something that's worthwhile, and that there is a reason they did that, and so that now these stories can be out there.

[01:16:42.14]

**Annemarie A.:** That's really amazing.

[01:16:44.15]

**Donna P.:** I also find the new generation—you know, at first I didn't believe the openness of white and black kids of my son's generation, of the millennials or the ones, even, but it's a lot more even, and a lot more open to learning some things, I mean, a lot of people, and it's genuine. So, this is the time to bring all these things out so that we can correct that history.

[01:17:11.09]

**Annemarie A.:** That's awesome. Well, I have one last question for you.

[01:17:14.08]

**Donna P.:** Okay, um-hm.

[01:17:16.25]

**Annemarie A.:** And it's, what do you see as the future of food journalism? What do you hope for the future of food journalism?

[01:17:22.25]

**Donna P.:** What I hope for the future of food journalism is that it takes over all of journalism and it becomes the front page. What I see, I'm not so sure. For instance, the whole future

of print, of course, is—I think we'll look back on it and we'll be talking about the history of print journalism because of costs and all of that. I see the future, I'm hoping, very much, that the whole influencer thing is gone, because to me, that whole thing is about the advertisers that we had to kick out of food journalism. And we had to kick them out, and we had to say, "No," you know, "You cannot do this to me. You cannot make me write about your olive oil by sending me cases, or you cannot do all of these things." I'm hoping that, but it's gone very far, that people—consumers—can at least understand or see that influencers are people who . . . are being paid to influence. Or, they can see the value in the recipes that come from journalists. But I don't know. I'm not sure. I think we're at a strange time, and I think that's why it's important for me to reach forward and to look back, and to be a part of all of it and to be a bridge, and to realize that, just as I realize that that's what people who came before me were looking back on something totally different that I didn't understand till now. So I'm just hoping to be a positive bridge in whatever that future is going to be.

[01:19:03.02]

**Annemarie A.:** That's awesome. Is there anything else that you want to add that you haven't said?

[01:19:05.19]

**Donna P.:** I'm sure I'll think about it in a while. But I do want to add that I love feedback from cooks, from people that—there is something that I don't ever cook alone in my kitchen. Truly, truly. When I'm standing there, when I'm doing recipes and reaching for this or

that, I'm feeling the people that came before me. There are people, every generation has that person. I have my little grand-niece, Sattahpi, who watches the rolls. She comes to my house, we make rolls together. We do this together, we do this. I have my niece, Allison, who said, "Aunt Donna, here's a recipe, I remember doing this with you." And so everybody, we've got one or two that are truly going to, you know, just the way my grandmother knew with me, I was going to be there with the recipe. Even if I wasn't doing it professionally, I was going to have those rolls. And I'm the one who makes the family rolls, and they were going to be just like the ones her grandmother had made for her. It's my favorite story, that we grew up with Granny's rolls, Granny's rolls. Then I was making Granny's rolls when my sister was living in Philadelphia and one day, she said, I Fed-Exed Granny's rolls to her so she could have 'em for her Thanksgiving. That's who I'm teaching, my nieces and nephews, 'cause that poundcake and gumbo are like our three family recipes. But Granny's rolls. We were at Thanksgiving last year, and Sattahpi goes, "These aren't Granny's rolls!" She goes, "These were Aunt Donna's rolls." I realized that was okay, because Granny's rolls didn't start out as Granny's rolls. Those were Big Mama's rolls. So, every generation, they will—one day, they will be Sattahpi's rolls. So that, to me, is why it's so much more—and especially with the culture where we had our names taken away, our language taken away, everything. I want to make sure that our food traditions and our culture, that we helped shape American food, that that remains, too, identified as something that we have significantly contributed to and created.

[01:21:34.09]

**Annemarie A.:** That's awesome. Thank you so much very much for this.

[01:21:38.04]

**Donna P.:** Thank you so very much.

*[End of interview]*