

**DOROTHY FINISTER**  
**Two Sister's Restaurant—New Orleans, LA**

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Date: July 20, 2007  
Location: 223 N. Derbigny Street—New Orleans, LA  
Interviewer: Sara Roahen  
Length: 47 minutes  
Project: Southern Gumbo Trail

**[Begin Dorothy Finister-Gumbo Interview]**

00:00:00

**Sara Roahen:** This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Friday, July 20, 2007. I'm in New Orleans, Louisiana at Two Sister's Restaurant with Miss Dorothy Finister. So if you don't mind, if you could say your name and your birth date and how you make your living?

00:00:18

**Dorothy Finister:** Okay, my name is Dorothy Finister. My birth date is May 22, 1939. And I make a living at Two Sister's by cooking, and we're open from 8:00 to 5:00, so I'm here from 8:00 to 5:00 cooking every day.

00:00:38

**SR:** Is it a seven-day-a-week operation?

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**DF:** No, we—Monday through Saturday.

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**SR:** And where did that name, Two Sister's, come from?

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**DF:** Oh that goes way back. Originally it was two sisters that owned the place. But oh, that goes back further than 34 years, because I've been here 34 years. And both of the sisters are deceased, and we bought it from one of the sisters that was still living and we've been here 34 years, so we just kept the name Two Sister's. They asked us—the sister that we bought it from asked us to—don't change the name; she said it would bring us good luck, so I'm still waiting. *[Laughs]*

00:01:30

**SR:** Do you know what their names were—those two sisters?

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**DF:** No, I know one of them, the one that we bought it from, because she was the onliest one living at the time. Her name was Odell, Miss Odell Lewis. And the other sister I really don't know.

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**SR:** And so 34 years—what year would that have been? I can't do the math in my head.

00:01:50

**DF:** I think it went back to 1972 that we came here. So it may add up, maybe a year or two different, but we came here in '72.

00:02:03

**SR:** And are you from New Orleans?

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**DF:** I was born here, raised on the Gulf Coast in Mississippi. But I was born in New Orleans.

00:02:14

**SR:** And what inspired you to open a restaurant here?

00:02:18

**DF:** It was my husband; he used to eat here every day. And at the time I wasn't working and I had two girls and a boy, and he said that it would be something for the girls to do. But it seems as though that it—the girls is involved; the girls still works here. Both of my daughters work here, although I have three daughters—all three of them works here. But at that particular time I had two that was old enough to be here; so now I have three—all of them here; all three girls works here.

00:03:00

**SR:** Can you tell me their names?

00:03:02

**DF:** Nadine, Collette, and Shanel. Shanel is our cook really; Collette, she manages the floor with the waitresses; and Nadine do some of the cooking, but basically Shanel is the youngest one and she does most of the cooking.

00:03:24

**SR:** And so does she follow your original recipes?

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**DF:** With some things, only with some things; all of us do basically the same thing as far as some of the recipes—basically.

00:03:42

**SR:** And where did you learn how to cook?

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**DF:** Um, I think I learned how to cook here 'cause when we came here one of the sisters was still here and she stayed here about three years after we took the restaurant over, so that helped us out a lot.

00:04:01

**SR:** So you didn't cook much before then?

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**DF:** Only at my house, but my husband did most of the cooking. He loved to cook and when we came here he started out cooking really. I didn't do a lot of cooking. And right now I only do some things because I have things that I—only that I cook—like with the dessert: don't nobody

make banana pudding but me. I make that myself. Now it's two or three people that can make the bread pudding, but nobody seems to touch the banana pudding. I don't know why. **[Laughs]** As far as some of the dishes, let me see what it was that I originated. The shrimp and okra, I started that myself. Actually, I think I'm the one that brought that to New Orleans. I had an aunt that lived in Mississippi; she used to fix that. And she would put crabs in it, but here we just make the shrimp with okra and we don't put the crabs 'cause when you put the crabs it's more or less like a gumbo. Actually, 30-some years ago I don't think you could find shrimp and okra on nobody's menu. That's the reason why I take credit for that. But now you can go to plenty of restaurants and find shrimp and okra. Uh-hm.

00:05:33

**SR:** And so do you think that—is that something that you grew up eating in Mississippi?

00:05:38

**DF:** Oh yes. My aunt fixed that all the time and I loved it. Most of the family loved it. But she had certain things she fixed on certain days. Like on Sunday she had the same thing—every Sunday—which would be roast, potato salad, green peas. That was her dish every Sunday. So if you went there on Sunday you knew what you was going to get 'cause that's all she had, the same thing every Sunday—always had a pot roast.

00:06:04

**SR:** So you learned to cook some things from your aunt?

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**DF:** Basically the shrimp and okra, and my mother cooked—my mother was one of the best cooks with red beans. My mother, she was a good cook, but she didn't fix the shrimp and okra, but she made gumbo. She would make filé gumbo. She always make her gumbo and put the filé in it afterwards. We don't fix filé gumbo. We just fix regular gumbo. If the customer wants filé we always have it for them to sprinkle on it, but we don't make filé gumbo.

00:06:48

**SR:** Real quick, before I ask you more about your gumbo, is your mother from New Orleans or from Mississippi?

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**DF:** My mother—um, my mother was born and raised in Mississippi but she had moved here 'cause this is where I was born, in New Orleans.

00:07:05

**SR:** I was just wondering if red beans was a Mississippi thing or if she—.

00:07:11

**DF:** Um, basically yes, yes; I would say yes, uh-hm. We have like white beans on Tuesday, black-eyed peas on Wednesday, back to red beans—. Actually we have red beans three times a week: Monday, Thursday, and Saturday, but like on Wednesday we have black-eyes; Tuesday we have white beans; Friday we have butter beans. I think just about everybody eat red beans

though. That's why we have it three times a week, but some people will come in asking for the white beans. At first I didn't think the black-eyed peas would sell so well, but they sell pretty good too, but it's not one of my favorites. *[Laughs]*

00:07:58

**SR:** Well for the record, the butter beans is one of my—that's one of my favorite things to get here.

00:08:03

**DF:** Oh really?

00:08:03

**SR:** Yeah.

00:08:05

**DF:** Well we have that every Friday and they have people that eat butter beans. They make sure they come here on Friday to get their butter beans. I like butter beans also, but red beans is my favorite, uh-hm.

00:08:18

**SR:** Do the red beans sell more on Mondays than on other days?

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**DF:** Oh yeah, 'cause Monday is red bean day in New Orleans. Somebody had said something and they said, *Oh, in New Orleans red beans is a favorite dish on Mondays.* Yeah, only on Monday we sell more red beans than we do on Thursday and Saturday. Well Saturday—a lot of the people that works is off. A lot of workers don't work on Saturday, so that's I guess why I would say it was less on Saturday.

00:08:56

**SR:** And so you mean—is most of your clientele people who come in here from work?

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**DF:** Yes, yes, we get a lot of workers, 'cause we're not open at night. We close at 5 o'clock. So we open at 8:00 in the morning and we close at 5:00. Before the hurricane we used to close at 6:00, but I kind of think like right now, I like it at 5:00. I don't know, maybe later on as it—after hurricane season or whatever—we'll probably stay open 'til 6:00 again.

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**SR:** Can you tell me what kind of gumbo you make here?

00:09:34

**DF:** Well, Creole. That's what we would call it: Creole gumbo. And it have the shrimps and the crabs and the hot sausage. You can't make it without hot sausage. You can't make it without shrimps and crabs either. And now I find some people don't like okra in their gumbo, but we puts okra in our gumbo, uh-hm. Some people, they say *Well if it have okra I don't want it,*

because a lot of people don't eat okra, but it doesn't hinder our sales for gumbo by putting okra in it.

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**SR:** And you make it with a roux?

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**DF:** No, we put what you call a gumbo base and you buy that—it comes in the boxes; it's a base. It's called gumbo base. It's like a roux, but it's a powder that comes in the box that thickens your gumbo and have a real good taste. That's what really makes—I think—I don't think a lot of people know about that, but that's what thickens the gumbo. So we don't put a roux in it. Actually the only thing we do with roux is gravies, like for the smothered pork chops and smothered chicken—stuff like that we'll put a roux. We make roux; we don't put it in the gumbo. We put the gumbo base in it and that thickens it up like a roux would do. So--.

00:11:05

**SR:** And the okra thickens it up a little bit too I guess.

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**DF:** Right, it does, okra does. I remember years ago in the country, when they would put okra it would kind of make it a little slimy like, but we don't have that problem. I don't know why; I don't know what's the difference. I don't know, I think in the country they did it with real cut

okra from the garden. And you have to steam that down to keep it from being slimy. By us using frozen okra that's already been preserved, we don't have that problem.

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**SR:** And at what point do you put the okra in? Do you cook it first or boil it?

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**DF:** Yeah, we cook it first and when you get just about done [making the gumbo], then we put the okra, so the okra don't come all to pieces and be like in little bitty pieces. It should be almost done before you add the okra and just let it steam, you know, and that will keep the okra from just cooking all up and in little bitty pieces.

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**SR:** And it seems like I've had other meats besides hot sausage in your gumbo, or is that not—?

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**DF:** Hot sausage, sometimes ham, cubed ham, cut up in little bitty cubes. We have ham, hot sausage, smoked sausage, and sometimes chicken giblets. That's what it is: chicken giblets. I think that's the onliest meat; that's the onliest filling besides the okra, your shrimp, the crabs. We never use oysters in gumbo. That's not allowed. Too many people don't eat oysters, and from what I've found over the years with other people, when you put oysters in your gumbo it sours quick. I remember one year a friend of mine and my husband's had made a big pot of gumbo 'cause a lot of people would always go by their house to eat and stop on Christmas, and we

stopped there. We had come from Bay St. Louis and we said *We're hungry but everything is closed. Where we going to eat?* So he said, *Oh I know: we'll go by Miss Karne's*, because that's where he used to live before we got married. And she had gumbo, but when she took the top off of it, it was bubbly. That was the oysters, so from that day on—well I wasn't really cooking then because actually we had just got married and I wasn't really cooking a lot and we didn't have the place either, but she said it was the oysters. I mean and she was devastated 'cause she said she had so much money in that pot of gumbo. And then another thing: you can't vacuum pack it. That will make it sour too—like keep the top on it with no air getting to it. That will make it sour quick.

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**SR:** Like when it's hot and putting the top on?

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**DF:** Yeah; don't put the top on it and like keep it vacuum packed down 'cause about the time they get all the way cool down it should be bubbly so you don't--you don't vacuum pack it.

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**SR:** What was the name of the--of the woman whose house you went by—Karnes?

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**DF:** Yeah, Miss Karne. She lived over on Galvez, and that's where my husband used to stay before we got married. She had apartments over there, actually a couple of blocks down this

street, but they're all deceased now including my husband. He's deceased. Yeah, my husband been dead 13 years. So I started running it completely by myself with the girls. I have an older daughter that's up in her 40s, but she was working here. I think all my children was working here when he died, and he's been dead 13 years now. And the part that we all remember about that: he died on New Year's night, so when New Year's come everybody get devastated and nobody be at the house. Everybody finds someplace to go 'cause you know something—out of town or something—'cause he died at the house from a massive heart attack. So New Year's is a no-no for us to be at the house. New Year's Eve, yes, maybe shooting firecrackers and this and that; New Year's night, no. Everybody is gone. **[Laughs]**

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**SR:** It's hard when that happens around a holiday, when you're supposed to be happy.

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**DF:** Yes, yes. And he wasn't sick in bed. He had just came home from work. Massive heart attack. He was looking at a movie and he just layed down on his stomach, on his arms folded, which every time I turn over on my stomach now I think about it: *nope, let me get off my stomach and turn over on my side or my back* 'cause that's the way he died. He layed on his stomach and I don't know. Well he had a sister that died two weeks before him. They all had heart disease. She died two weeks before him as a matter of fact. He helped paid for her funeral and then two weeks later he was gone. So, but like I say, he had just came home from work. Just one of those things, but you know if you could pick instead of just being down sick in the bed, I would rather want to go that way, just like that, 'cause when you're down sick in a bed you're

suffering, you're at the hands of other people to wait on you and care for you. Well he never went through that, so—.

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**SR:** Yeah, and neither did you all.

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**DF:** Right, the family didn't go through that. He was just gone. Actually he had just came home from work and he sent my daughter to get him some Church's chicken wings, and she went and got the chicken wings and he always wanted jalapeno peppers. He told her when she was going out the door, *Don't forget the jalapeno pepper*. And she came back with it. And we have pretty large house, so they was in the den, some of them in the bedroom, and I was the onliest one sitting there with him. Actually, on—like a holiday night like that was, I should have been in the den with them. If I would have been back in the den with them, he would have been dead and I wouldn't have known it because I wouldn't have been in there with him. And he always say, *Don't wake me up once I go to sleep; just cover me up*. So I probably would have just covered him up not knowing, but as God would have it I sit there. For some unknown reason I just—he was on the sofa, I was on the loveseat, and all of the sudden it hit him and knocked him all the way up. And he said three words on his way back down: *Lord have mercy*. I never will forget that. That was his last three words. I guess he knew he was dying. That's—he did get that out: *Lord have mercy*. So that's it, and it's—we continue to run the restaurant without him and we done came into a few hurdles, like with Katrina. Katrina—we had four-feet of water in here, the roof off, most of the roof was off, the overhang, and insurance papers. If you don't have flood

[insurance], the insurance is not going to cover most of your damage inside from the water because it's flood, and we didn't have flood but we had insurance that did the other part. But we have a good carpenter friend and he actually—. We all left going to Atlanta for Katrina. We left that Sunday, a caravan about 12 carloads. And we came—we stayed up there a month, and me and my son came back and we said, *We got to get the place open and going*. So they didn't have any electric in this area, so what he did—he had a generator that he worked in here with 'cause he knew this was our onliest way of making a living. So he worked in here with a generator. About two weeks after, he had gotten just about finished, here come the lights. Because we didn't have no lights in the area. Okay, after the lights we had water but we didn't have no gas.

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**SR:** Can't cook that way.

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**DF:** Nope, but I was about to give up. I had—I said I'm not going to let Entergy—'cause every time I would call the Entergy about the gas they said, *No, they have water in the line. They have water in the line, and we don't know exactly when you will gas*. I said, *Oh Lord*. I was staying with my daughter 'cause my house had water in it. So I woke up one morning and I said, *I'm not going to let Entergy keep me from making another dollar. We have lights; I'm going to change everything over to electric*. We changed the hot water heater. We changed the steam table. Show you my luck: we had a grill; okay, then we had the deep fryers, so we changed—I changed all that over to electric. We opened on February 13, 2006. February 14<sup>th</sup>, here come the gas—one day later.

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**SR:** But if you hadn't done that, the gas wouldn't have come on until June.

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**DF:** It probably wouldn't have. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But it's all good. So when we opened, we had put out the little sticker signs that you see stuck in the neutral grounds: "Two Sister's Now Open." So we had about 50 of those made, and we went all uptown, all downtown, all across town and stick them like—Jefferson Parish had some type of law against that; you couldn't do that in Jefferson Parish, which I didn't know. So just sticking them in the neutral ground in Orleans Parish was good enough. So when the first day we opened, we opened with a nice line outside waiting to get in. A lot of people had been waiting on this kind of food, and during that time after Katrina a lot of places wasn't open. It took a while.

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**SR:** I remember that it felt like—I was here during that era and it felt like you opened really soon compared to other restaurants.

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**DF:** We did, we did. We opened in February and the hurricane was what—the last of August. So it took about—well like I say, we was in Atlanta a whole month before we came home to do anything. So we came home, just my son and I, and then we came—we got here almost night

because they had all kind of—what you call it?—checkpoints that they was checking to just really get back in the city. You couldn't just—. **[Interruption]**

00:24:21

**SR:** And so when you reopened after Katrina, people—people must have really been missing this kind of food.

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**DF:** They were. Actually they was, and there wasn't a lot of places like this open. I think we was the first soul food place to open, and then as— up to now, a lot of places that was open before the storm haven't reopened. Some of them are not going to reopen. They just took that little insurance money and left. I guess if business would have been like real slow for us, I probably would have did the same thing, but I knew this is a place where we all make a living. All my family works here, all my girls. I have two boys: I have one boy that went to the military, and he works for the post office. So other than that, everybody else works here. So that—that was the incline on getting it open because that's the way it was before Katrina. The family works here; it's a family business. I have three daughters, myself, and one son that works here and as— like right now I don't have to be here. They can run it without me, which is a good thing. Uh-hm.

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**SR:** And how is—how is business now compared to before the storm?

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**DF:** It's about normal; it's about the same thing. At first, when we first opened after the storm, a lot of people really wasn't back in town so the more peoples that come—every day somebody come in and say, *Well I'm back. I was in Texas, or I was in Georgia, but now I'm back.* And the more people that come back the better it is for us, because they was coming here before the storm. So a lot of people, when they come in town they comes here and that's a good thing. And then some of them say *Oh, I didn't know you all was open.* And like yesterday, a lady said—  
**[Mrs. Finister pauses to greet a customer].** Like yesterday a lady said, *I had asked if you all was open but I didn't know you all was open.* But anyway, she lives in Baton Rouge, so—. But the storm was the last of August. Okay, the whole month of September I was in Georgia and the last part of October we got started here. October, November, December, January—well like I say, it took us a while because the electric wasn't in the area—no electric in the area. Then after the electric came on no gas in the area. The onliest thing you really could have was water.

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**SR:** When you were in Georgia, what did you eat?

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**DF:** We went on 65 and they had—I found that in Georgia they had a lot of barbeque places, more barbeque there than what we have here. We would get like barbeque and Applebee's 'cause we stayed close to Applebee's. I guess—.

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**SR:** Did you make some food?

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**DF:** Yeah, actually I stayed at this hotel—the Omni Suite in—the hotel we stayed in—I’m trying to see—College Park. We was in College Park, Georgia, and to be honest with you this was the funny part: when they found out that we was there, they came on the radio, they say *Two Sister’s in town; don’t let them go back to New Orleans. Keep them out here.* Then they put us in the newspaper. It was really nice after they found—and then I had offers to stay. Some people wanted me to go in partnership with them; some people wanted me to just take over their restaurant and run it like I would run this and they would give me a nice set salary from it. And my saying was, *No, I gotta go home. Gotta go back to New Orleans.* But what I did while we was out there—guess what? You’re going to like this part. I made gumbo for the hotel employees. Chief Pennington, which used to be the [police] chief here, he’s a personal friend of ours, so I made gumbo for him. The hotel let us use their meeting room, and they set it up for us, and we got our cups and our bowls and all, and I made the gumbo. They let me make it in their kitchen at the hotel, so all we had to do was just transfer it over to the meeting room. That—that was good. Everybody that was in—all the employees—they was saying, *They have gumbo! Two Sister’s made gumbo! It’s going to be in the meeting room.* And that was on a Sunday evening; it lasted for—‘til about 7 o’clock, it was all gone. They was coming with containers: *Can I take some home? Can I—?* I said, *Whatever as long as it lasts; just take it until it’s gone.* So the Chief, he came and he took a container home for his wife. All the employees that that day that wasn’t off, they came in the meeting room to get gumbo. So I made gumbo in Atlanta.

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**SR:** Could you find all the ingredients?

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**DF:** What was it that was hard to get? Bay leaf, and I don't even know if we had bay leaf 'cause I like bay leaf. It changes the flavor. Atlanta didn't have a lot of stuff that, like, we basically use—like the base. Couldn't find the gumbo base; couldn't find the bay leaf.

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**SR:** So what did you do instead of the gumbo base?

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**DF:** Roux. I had to make my own roux: brown the rue and put it in there.

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**SR:** Do you put thyme in your gumbo?

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**DF:** No, I like it if somebody else put it in. I really don't know about how much to put in with thyme, but I feel as though if you put bay leaf in it you don't just really need the thyme. It would be like double-doing it or something. I don't—I'm going to ask—Shanel? Come here a second. I'm going to ask her if she ever put thyme in there. I never put—she makes the gumbo now here 'cause a lot of times, and since I stepped on that nail. Do you put thyme in your gumbo?

00:31:35

**Shanel:** Yeah, thyme, bell pepper, onion, salt, pepper, Season All, garlic—.

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**DF:** Bay leaf?

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**Shanel:** Bay leaf and filé.

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**SR:** Oh, so you put filé in your gumbo?

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**Shanel:** Oh yeah, yeah. It's not gumbo without filé.

00:31:57

**DF:** She's the one that does it now 'cause I stepped on a rusty nail. I've been in the hospital two weeks. I almost lost my foot.

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**SR:** Where did you step on the nail?

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**DF:** My neighbor got a new roof put on, and I probably stepped on it getting in the car or getting out the car 'cause her house is right next to mine and my driveway is right next to her house. I was—almost two weeks.

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**SR:** It got infected?

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**DF:** Actually, yeah, the side of my foot. See, I still have a pump on, a wound pump. I hook it up at night.

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**SR:** Wait, what is it called?

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**DF:** A wound pump: it pumps out all the—I have to go back to the doctor Monday. I kind of think they going to take it off, and then I can wear regular shoes. Like right now I can't wear a regular shoe on account of the pump.

00:32:41

**SR:** No. I didn't even notice that. I'm sorry. So Shanel she said that she used something. Season All. Is that what she said?

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**DF:** Yeah, we using Season All in just about all our pots. In all our recipes.

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**SR:** And—

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**DF:** Season All—well you know what Season All is, huh? Comes in a can—.

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**SR:** Right, but can you explain what it is, just for the record?

00:33:05

**DF:** Season All is just what it says: it have cayenne pepper, black pepper, ground up dried tomatoes, like ground up. You wouldn't know it's tomatoes 'cause it's ground up, and just garlic powder—it just have all the seasonings in it. That's why it's called Season All.

00:33:29

**SR:** Was your husband from New Orleans?

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**DF:** No, he was from North Louisiana: Winnsboro, Monroe—up that way.

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**SR:** And so the gumbo that you both grew up on must have been different from this gumbo, huh?

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**DF:** Well actually they didn't have gumbo up there, no. He didn't—and he didn't eat gumbo. No, he didn't eat gumbo. Up there they didn't have gumbo. North Louisiana people have a different—and when I first met him and went up there, they was like killing chickens in the yard. You know, go out on Sunday morning and kill a chicken. I wasn't used to that; that's the kind of stuff they was doing up there then. And kill a hog and hang it up in some kind of dry house for the bacon and stuff. I wasn't used to any of that; it's a different kind of living. They don't do that now, but when I first met him 30-some years ago and I went to North Louisiana, that's the kind of stuff they was doing. And lot of stuff I really wasn't into. And I'm going to tell you this little joke. Up there, his mother would have everybody to sit down at the table, ask the blessing. You couldn't [do] like my kids: they just, when you cook they'll just go in the kitchen and fix their food. Up there everybody had to sit down at the table; the table was set with the food. So this particular Sunday that I was up there, I think we had just got married about a year or something and they passing the food around. And when they came to the deer meat, it's dark, and they looking at each other and when they pass it to me and I say, *No, I don't want none*. They said, *That's roast*. I say, *I don't want any*. And they say, *Why? You don't eat roast?* I say, *Not that kind because when I see meat that's darker than me I don't want it*. **[Laughs]** Deer meat is dark; I didn't want it. I don't eat meat that's darker than me, so they laughed. And I said, *What kind of*

*meat that is anyway? And my husband said, That's deer. I said, I knew something was wrong that I didn't want it. Nope, didn't want it.*

00:36:06

**SR:** Where did you meet your husband—in New Orleans?

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**DF:** Yeah, a couple blocks from here. I need a napkin. Yeah, we met here over on Galvez, by this lady Miss Karne I was telling you about earlier in the interview. She had apartments, and he stayed over there.

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**SR:** What kind of gumbo—did you grow up eating gumbo?

00:36:35

**DF:** No, my grandmother—I mostly was with my grandmother. My mother would make gumbo, but it had to be for a holiday: Christmas, maybe Easter. That's about the onliest two holidays there is. Gumbo is very expensive to make and—no, we just had regular food: stewed chicken, roasts. Actually, excuse me, we had roast every Sunday. That's what I was telling you: roast, green peas, potato salad. You didn't have to ask what's for dinner 'cause you already knew what was for dinner. Monday was red beans. My mother loved to fix meatball and spaghetti, and we had that about twice a week. And to be honest with you, on Saturdays, it was clean-up day. You clean up the house on Saturday: you dust the furniture, you vacuum—whatever there was to be

cleaned up, that was Saturday, and what you had to eat on Saturday was sandwiches. She never cooked on Saturday. My mother never cooked on Saturday. We always had sandwiches: luncheon meats, salami. My favorite was the sandwich spread with the luncheon meat or bologna, and during that time we didn't have cold drinks. They had cold drinks to sell but we didn't—we had Kool-Aid. That's what we drank, and my mother would make like a great big pitcher of Kool-Aid with the Kool-Aid flavor and the sugar. A lot cheaper than buying cold drinks, so—.

00:38:20

**SR:** What about sweet tea? Did you drink that?

00:38:22

**DF:** We didn't have that. Mother never had that. I didn't have that until I came to New Orleans to stay—sweet tea. I like it. We have it. I drink tea here every day, but we didn't have that. We had Kool-Aid; that's what we had to drink was Kool-Aid. And like I said, on Saturday we had sandwiches—no cooking on Saturday. Red beans on Monday, meatball and spaghetti twice a week, and I don't know what we had on Thursday. Let me see...that okra, the shrimp and—I think we had that on Fridays.

00:39:05

**SR:** Shrimp and okra?

00:39:06

**DF:** Uh-huh. Red beans on Monday and spaghetti twice a week, probably Tuesday and Thursday. I can't remember what Wednesday was; whatever it was it was a repeat. Whatever you had this Tuesday you had next Tuesday, and whatever you had this Wednesday you had next Wednesday. So we had a repeat of the same thing, and Saturday no cooking—sandwiches; Kool-Aid.

00:39:35

**SR:** What about—I know that you serve your gumbo here with potato salad, and that's—not every restaurant does that. How did you start doing that?

00:39:43

**DF:** From the country. If we had gumbo, we had to have potato salad. And, which I don't, but a lot of people from the country, and I find they do that: they get the salad and they put that scoop of salad right down in the middle of the gumbo, and they eat around that, and then when all the gumbo is gone they still eating the salad. I could never do that. *[Laughs]* But I see people doing that, and actually I don't know if any of my kids do that. I don't think so. But you don't have gumbo without potato salad. It's—

00:40:24

**SR:** What about if you have family get-togethers—does gumbo play a role in your celebrations?

00:40:30

**DF:** Yes, but the only time we would have a family get-together like is on Mother's Day, Easter, or Christmas. Mother's Day, Easter, or Christmas. I don't know why people never do anything too much for Father's Day. **[Laughs]** Didn't do no special dinners, since I got grown, you would go out like to eat on Father's Day or something; so—. Nothing special, no, uh-um. Easter, Christmas, and Mother's Day—that was a sure-fire thing to have, gumbo and potato salad. And then after we got older, up in life, we elevated to cold drinks instead of Kool-Aid. **[Laughs]** When I was growing up, no cold drinks; had Kool-Aid. No iced tea either.

00:41:27

**SR:** We didn't have cold drinks when I was growing up either.

00:41:31

**DF:** Yeah, yeah.

00:41:34

**SR:** And so your girls—we just met Shanel, who is the main cook right now it sounds like. So she learned how to cook growing up in the restaurant, huh?

00:41:42

**DF:** Yes, she learned here. Not at home 'cause her daddy did all the cooking at home. I did very little cooking at home. Sometime he would leave early, and when we would get home he would be done cooked everything and have it all laid out on the counter. All we had to do was just go and eat. But I never did a lot of cooking at home; he did most of the cooking and—but like I told

you. When we first took the restaurant over, one of the owners that used to have it, they stayed here with us four years. So that meant we had very little cooking to do, but we knew what was going on with them being cooks. And we had a cook for 12 years, somebody that worked here and did the cooking, and she was very good. She ended up getting her own little restaurant uptown, and after that we did our own cooking 'til we hired the chef that we have now. His name is Michael.

00:42:54

**SR:** Oh what—Michael, what's his last name?

00:42:56

**DF:** Biggs, uh-hm.

00:42:56

**SR:** The cook that opened her own place uptown, does that restaurant still exist? [**Mrs. Finister shakes her head, no.**] What about—what do you call your food here? Do you call it Creole cooking or Soul food or—?

00:43:11

**DF:** A little of both but mainly soul food. But we have Creole too, you know. And what part of the food that we have we call Cajun food?

00:43:30

**SR:** You have Cajun food?

00:43:32

**DF:** Yeah, and I'm trying to see what part of the food that we have that we call Cajun food. One part of it is the—like the rice, like dirty rice—that's Cajun food. Or seasoned rice. That's my Uncle Jim. **[Mrs. Finister greets her late husband's uncle, who has just entered the restaurant.]**

00:44:10

**SR:** I'll just ask a couple more questions and we'll wrap up, because you're starting in on lunch service here. So you said you have some Creole and some soul food here. Can you tell me, what is the difference between Creole food and soul food?

00:44:25

**DF:** Okay, my difference is Creole food is, like I was saying about the shrimp with okra, some of the gumbo, Cajun rice—well, that would be Cajun food with the rice. Soul food is neck bones, pig-tails, pork chops, red beans, greens, cabbage—that's soul food. Neck bones especially, pig-tails, and we serve both of that. We have neck bones every day. But we only have pig-tails once a week. Pork chops we have every day—smothered pork chops. Now, pork chops can be used as a Cajun food also. But we use it mostly as a soul food. Red beans is soul; that's definitely soul food. And neck bones, you can't just go to a lot of places and get neck bones. That's soul food.

00:45:26

**SR:** Where do you get the neck bones?

00:45:29

**DF:** We get it from like Chisesi [Brothers]—that's a meat place—and then we get it from another—what that is? Robert's. Robert's have neck bones, and they cut them. All we have to do is cook them; they already cut serving style—they cut up already.

00:45:58

**SR:** How often do you serve gumbo? Is it every day?

00:45:59

**DF:** The gumbo—oh no; too expensive to serve every day. Gumbo, we serve that on Friday and Saturday only. Only on Friday and Saturday. If by any chance during certain times of year that we're open on a Sunday, we have it then. Like Essence [Music Festival] was here a couple of weeks ago and we had it then. People from out of town, that's what they looking for. But ordinarily Friday and Saturday is the onliest times we serve it.

00:46:33

**SR:** Okay, well I'm going to wrap this up so you can get back to work, but thank you so much for your time.

00:46:38

**DF:** Thank you for interviewing me. Thank you for having me. If there is anything else you need to know, just feel free to call me.

00:46:46

**SR:** I will.

00:46:48

**DF:** Okay.

00:46:48

**[End Dorothy Finister-Gumbo Interview]**