

## **Voices of Southern Hospitality: An Oral History Project**

**Interviewee:** Mauclet, Jean Marie

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### **Biographical Note:**

Jean-Marie Mauclet and his partner, Gywlene Gallimard, moved to Charleston, South Carolina in 1984 to open their restaurant, Fast and French. The couple, who are trained artists from France, envisioned Fast and French as a thriving business but also as a conceptual art project. They labored to create a space where the wealthy dined elbow to elbow with the poor, employees earned living wages, and community solidarity was fostered. Despite selling Fast and French, after 30 years of ownership, Mauclet continues to be involved in his lifelong pursuit of social and economic justice. He is a founding member of the progressive art project *ConNECKtedTOO*, which seeks to promote compassion and solidarity among people of disparate socio-economic backgrounds in Charleston.

### **Project Details:**

In the summer of 2018, student researchers from the College of Charleston conducted oral histories for the research project, *Voices of Southern Hospitality*. The project documents diverse opinions and stories about southern hospitality in Charleston, South Carolina, but also offers a deeper and more intimate history of a changing community. Over the past thirty years (early-1990s to 2018), the Charleston peninsula and its surrounding islands have experienced rapid economic growth and rapid cultural and ecological changes. The *Voices of Southern Hospitality* project chronicles this profound transformation with the personal histories of Charleston residents.

The project was launched in June 2018 with funding from The Committee for Innovative Teaching and Learning in the Liberal Arts and Sciences at the College of Charleston. In addition to documenting important stories, the project was designed to train College of Charleston students in oral history research methods. Five student researchers and 42 interviewees participated in the first phase of this project (June and July, 2018).

**Interviewer Initials: TM**

**Interviewee Initials: JMM**

**TM:** I have a couple... [of questions]

**JMM:** International study is part of political science [at the College of Charleston]?

**TM:** It used to be, but then it split into its own department.

**JMM:** Oh it split?

**TM:** Hmmm.

**JMM:** Okay.

**TM:** But it is related. We study poli sci as well.

**JMM:** Because I have a degree in political science from the University of Buffalo New York, SUNY and Buffalo.

**TM:** Okay.

**JMM:** And I also have degree in art. And I went to Cooper Union in architecture. And what else? So I studied up quite a bit.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** And the rest on. So we're interviewing now?

**TM:** Hmmm, yes.

**JMM:** So you-you ask questions, right?

**TM:** Yes.

**JMM:** Okay, go ahead. I was going to tell my story.

**TM:** Sure. No, no, I'm sure the questions will bring the story out itself. But yea, first questions: where are you from?

**JMM:** I am from France, outside Paris. I studied there until I came to this country in 1969, so I'm an old man, you have to know that. I'm 69. I studied political science at the University of Buffalo, because I couldn't do it in France. In France it's difficult to change direction when you have chosen one.

So I did that and then went back to France teach art, if that's, yea. Yea because after political science I went to art, and I got a degree in art. And I went back to France to teach- they call the **Rosa Elsie** for five years. And, I came back here, and in the meantime I studied at Cooper Union, which is what students should do.

And sometimes they can do it, and Cooper was free. School was cheap at the time; now you cannot afford it, which is really terrible.

**TM:** Sure. So, what brought you to Charleston, specifically?

**JMM:** What brought us to Charleston specifically is that after teaching as well in Canada, with my partner Gywlene, she was in Montreal and I was in New Brunswick, and we'd met at the University, and this is in France teaching art. That's part of the saying, it's a very, it's a very tight package really, you know, so I have to say that. In France we taught classes together. We proposed that instead of teaching two dimension one class, and three dimension in another, you'd put everything together, and go from one to the next, and from the second to the third dimension, as far as representation goes to the meaning of all of this. So we're trying to put meaning in the art, and that reverberated when we came, we decided to stop teaching, and refused to use the arts as a means of survival. Under the, on the art market, in the art market, because it's too compromising. It's all money. It's all nothing. It's all fluff. So we tried to find another trade. And we chose to open a small French café because that's something I'd apparently thought of forever. People told me, I didn't remember, I didn't know but they told me, "Yes, you always talked about that!" So this French cafe was started as an art project. It took us nine months, as artists. That was in 1984. It was passed to a conceptual art stage. I mean, in the world, but yet we still had that in our, in our blood, so we decided to make a conceptual art project, working on a small restaurant, model of a small French cafe, in America. And it was not a compromise. It was the reunion of the French culture, and as far as our food goes, and the American culture as far as food goes. Meaning fast food, the process of turning out food as fast as possible, as cheap as possible. And the French process, which is to refine, you know. And whatever France can bring to its food. So that's the first, the first aspect of... am I answering your question?

**TM:** Sure, yes.

**JMM:** ... so first aspect of us, and is a link between two cultures, you know? French and American. My American culture I acquired being in America for a range of twenty years; that's a long time. And then culture was studying the arts in the '60's, end of the 60's. 1968 and on strong feminist and whatever that implies. [She is a] very independent person, but extremely strict and severe in what she does, so we did that. We opened that cafe after nine months of conceptual work. We went to libraries like this, studied up, instead of getting four years at the American college of (community) art, whatever. We studied up, and came up with a box, which was in the format of the cafe we were, trying to open. A rectangular box, with inside all the studies you need to open a business, from a business like a restaurant, at costs of goods, financing, what do you call that? I'm forgetting because it's been a while now. Ordering, inventorying, paying people, paying taxes, everything that goes into doing a business, there is, because restaurants are well known for as long as they don't pay their employees and their taxes, which was not our purpose. Our purpose was to pay our employees as well as we would pay ourselves, and before we would pay ourselves, and to do a good job, but a good job for everyone. Everyone meaning that this box, this elongated box, which had everything, all the architecture, all the details, the furniture and everything. I mean everything we knew was in that box; this is what artists do. They just put everything they have in every project they can, they work on. So we did that, and the elongated box was a representation of an idea I had of a restaurant with two doors, one right, one left. One where people could pay, and one where people couldn't pay. And they would meet at a communal table, and the payer would obviously pay for the guy who couldn't pay, so it was a purely socialist venture, you know? But no, I don't still, I don't take the money out of the rich, they just invite someone that cannot afford it; that's very different. Anyway, so that's the format, that's the thing, and then we were doing that, and we did that. As we were doing that we lived in Asheville, North Carolina. Because we had a friend there that was a designer, industrial designer, from France actually, and he helped us with the design of whatever. Then we started looking around South Carolina, uh not South Carolina, the South. Atlanta, you name it, all those cities we visit, all the cities, Greensboro, Winston, Salem, Myrtle Beach, Florida, whatever. Charleston was the only one we found that was at the scale of a French city, at the time, it's 1984. You could, at the time, it was reasonable enough in rent that you could live where you worked, and that was a huge... it was a huge factor for us. Because you don't want to live in a city like New York where you work downtown, and you cannot afford an apartment, and you have to go to, you know, 25 miles away, and still not be able to afford it. So that was our thing, which Charleston was a small city, walkable, workable, and we kept coming back to Charleston on our way from Myrtle Beach to Atlanta, saying whoops, and then Savannah, whoops. Three times in a row. This building on Broad Street was still far away; nobody wanted it. So, and it was elongated, you know, it was perfect. Free standing, which represents the box, really, that's, you know. So we just, hardly any money at all, plunged into the thing. And that's the beginning of the story, basically. Obviously it was longer than we expected because as an art project we had not understood then that art projects, and we know it now, that art projects are not activities that start here and end there. There is always a consequence, and

there is always a flow coming out. And you have to be in that flow, or else what did you do? So, we lasted thirty years. The flow kept us going thirty years, and we sold it to the employees at the end, two, three of the employees of the cafe. So that's basically the story, and in thirty years it was the spirit, the, the mindset we had, we sort of created some kind of little community. I think Charleston, you know, has recognized us for what we tried to do. You know, which was not much, but was very important. So it became a base, really, for, we didn't want to do that necessarily, but every people that would come to work would be an artist, for example, or someone related to the arts. Students, or artists, starving artists, I don't know. But we were, we all shared this spirit of creativity.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** Which made for a very interesting business, really did. And a good important detail, people don't eat at tables, they eat at...

**TM:** The High Tops.

**JMM:** High Tops. Have you been there? Fast and French.

**TM:** I have.

**JMM:** Okay so you know, one of the reason is that when you are sitting on a stool you don't take as much as on a chair, because it's such a small place. That's an architectural, what do you call that... necessity there. And people that serve you look at you in the eye, which is, to us, was essential. You're not serving people. You just happened to give them food, that don't sell them food that day. You're not their servants, there is no sense of that. At least that is what we were trying to, and I think they still do that. They still have a very nice sense of community and... sense of social mixing. And so I think that was the reputation we got.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** So that's it I think.

**TM:** Great. Thank you for sharing the story with us. Could you describe your, like your guests, I guess. Are they more...

**JMM:** The what?

**TM:** Are they more locals? The guests who come in. Are they locals or tourists?

**JMM** I didn't get that word, again?

**TM:** Your guests.

**JMM:** Oh your guests. I thought you said your death.

**TM:** No, oh no.

**JMMt:** Not yet. it's coming. Not yet. The guests at the cafe?

**TM:** Yes Sir.

**JMM:** Well we didn't have many at the beginning, I can tell you. It took a long time... to get the thing going. One thing is that Charlestonians, and that I think, it's part of your interview, Charlestonians at the time, I'm not saying now, I don't know enough, were extremely worried about newcomers. From the first week on, we had people trying to just literally close us down.

**TM:** Really?

**JMM:** Yeah. There was an article in the *Post and Courier* at the time that said this little outfit opening pretending to be French, pretending, I mean the owner, the lady owner, my partner trying very hard to have a French accent that she speaks, she still has it, she cannot, she has never left the French accent. But they thought it was like a sales pitch. And they were insulting basically, from the start. So the people who came were already self-selected groups. Very few of them, but little by little people understood what we were trying to do. But the core of Charleston was always very snobbish, and, you know, haughty. They didn't want to come to our place. It was a bar situation, people eat together. I mean, I understand, you know. But that's what we were trying to bring to the city, which we did! Despite their opposition, anyway, that's, so first guests, few of them, but very friendly. And it grew, and grew, and grew. But we kept getting very bad reviews once in a while, although we got, the only reviews, don't say only, I take that back. The first reviews that got us going in Charleston was a *New York Times* review, in Spoleto, 1984. The *New York Times* at the time, at the time, was doing a page, every time there was a Spoleto they would have a page on Charleston. They don't do that anymore I don't think. And they would quote two or three restaurants, which is totally unfair for the fifty others, obviously. Anyways, they quoted us, and we couldn't say no. Without telling us, by the way, and it was, it was very good. And people start coming a little more, a little more, and then we got lots of good reviews from the *Charlotte Observer*, and, but Charleston was a stronghold. Even many, many years later, "This is a dump. We don't want to go there. Its food is bad, dah-dah-dah". I mean bullshit. I mean, you know. We knew what it, what it was coming from. And I think, I don't know, I know. I have, I have a lot of doubts about the... Anyway, yeah about the sincerity of those papers, again that's tourism. Tourism is driving them. Profit is driving them. That's all there is to it. That's my opinion.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** Ya know, if you open a restaurant because you have money to spend, money to do it, and you won't lose money because you have so much real estate you need to, you know, tax break or whatever, you do it, you don't care, it's fine. You close down the next year, who cares? It's just business. Food is not business, it's like art. Art is not business, that's really the difference.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** So that created a certain clientele, that's... I'm sure, yeah.

**TM:** Yeah. What're you... are you involved in any community affairs? Like you said, you mentioned Spoleto... were you involved in that in any way?

**JMM:** Yeah! I mean as far as time would permit, we would try to do things. But artists, as artists, we didn't do a thing for four years. At least four or five years. And then in 1989. Is that the Hurricane?

**TM:** Hugo?

**JMM:** Hugo?

**TM:** I think so.

**JMM:** Okay so it's not '89, it's '91. Those are two dates that I sort of get confused about. In 1991, which is you know, that many years after '84, Spoleto was looking for... had hired Mary Jane Jacob as a curator for a big, revolutionary, visual arts international show, which they never did after and never did before. So they had all those international people coming to Charleston. Big artists really, big names. And what did they find? They found two French people with a French cafe. Because we had done the kind of work they were looking for, I guess, partly. So that's how, that's how we went back into the arts, ya know? Part time, because we had to still work at the restaurant, obviously. And we kept working for many, many years too, you know, after that. But we worked more and more in the arts, and less and less in the restaurant. Meeting something very important I guess, in this world, is that you pass on everything you know, literally, to the people, so you trust them, and they trust you. Pass everything. I mean we gave them everything: the keys... the recipes. They did pretty much everything. That's the only way to go. But that's why we could do our art. So what was the question exactly?

**TM:** If you were involved in Spoleto?

**JMM:** Yea.

**TM:** But you mentioned that.

**JMM:** So Spoleto is that. And again the work was not very well received. I suppose a lot of jealousy in the city, which has a bunch of artists, and none of them had been chosen because they were not looking, for, like, watercolor artists. They were looking for installation artists, which is what we were doing. So, that made a lot of people angry, and they still are I'm sure. And I don't care. Okay.

**TM:** Sure thing. Would you describe, your restaurant as having hospitality? How do you...

**Jean-Marie Mauclet:** Your what?

**TM:** Your restaurant as being hospitable, hospitality?

**JMM:** I think that is nature of restaurant. If it's not hospitable, what is it? I mean, it's a, it's a feed for animals, for, for people. I mean hospitality, or yea, hospitality, is... it comes with it. Ya know? I guess it has to do a lot with the... with the employees. And the managers, or whatever. There was a respect to the people that pay for the, the service. And the workers respect the work they do, because they are being respected by who they work with. And they respect the food that they are serving. I mean, I know so. I personally I've heard that some restaurant workers wouldn't work in the restaurant they work at! I just, I think this is just totally unconscionable, basically. It's offensive.

**TM:** Sure. How would you define it, in a way? What behaviors would you relate to hospitality?

**JMM:** Behaviors of what? Employees? Or...

**TM:** Or just the identity, in general.

**JMM:** Hmm, didn't I answer that question yet? No? I mean identity, if you don't identify, at a certain, at a deeper level than your paycheck, with the people you work with or for, there is no hope for you. Or even for the business, really, ya know? So identity is a very, I mean, yeah, that's something we work on in our projects now. That's something we do now, we work on identities. At the time it was, obviously we didn't talk about it in those terms, but we highly respected employees. We gave them good training... good pay. That's part of hospitality.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** It works both ways.

**TM:** Yea.



**JMM:** You know? It's more than a service... it's a social cause in a way, you know? Social justice, I mean, what is, what's their slogan? What does it say? Food is a... civil right. Yea. Eating is a civil right. That's exactly what I think.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** That's... that's what civil rights are.

Our work!

**TM:** Would you say that Southern Hospitality is different? Southern Hospitality, is that different to you?

**JMM:** I mean how do I know? I don't, I cannot, I'm, I'm not going to make any... how do you call that, generalities. No, I don't know. No, I don't know. I don't want to say. When I hear this, this word, I mean that's something that I know I should not talk about that, it has to do with Southern Hospitality. Its starts in my mind to create tensions between class... class tensions.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** And I don't know if you want to talk about that, but that's a big thing for us. When, for example, when we sold the Cafe, when we decided to retire, decided right away of course to sell it to our employees. One final way to sell it to them...not all of them. Some of them are not interested. In any case, there were three of them we chose. There was a white lady, and two black people. One lives atop of the... above the...you know... north of the Peninsula. And one lived in North Charleston. I don't know if that's relevant but, Southern hospitality. Those two guys, having lived their lives as black people, underserved or underheard, or whatever, could not handle the responsibility, although they wanted to. I think one of them was just wise enough to say, "No I'm not going to do it.". The other one went, and got into it, and had such a hard time. It's very difficult. I don't know who said that, "Poor once, poor forever." You're poor and it stays with you. It's, yea. Survival is a tough thing. So, Southern Hospitality is something that cannot be disconnected from Southern slavery. There is no way. Southern, Northern, I mean you know American slavery, whatever. That is a generality I am going to make.

**TM:** Yea sure. I won't make you go any farther. Do you think that, well, do you think that that identify, the Southern hospitality plays into the tourism appeal of Charleston? Do you think that that's...

**JMM:** Plays in?

**TM:** Plays into the appeal of Charleston, to make people come?

**JMM:** Oh God, you... you really want me to answer that?

**TM:** You don't have to answer the questions if...

**JMM:** No, no I mean I want to answer this question... if you'll repeat it.

**TM:** The Southern hospitality aspect, do you think that that plays into the role of Charleston in its development and tourism?

**JMM:** I mean Charleston has not lost one ounce of its... of its, privilege. When you call, and it's not only in Charleston, but Charleston especially, when you call a hotel or resort a plantation, you know that something has not changed. If you're not shocked by the fact that some developer is going to call his development a plantation, you know that you're in the hands of someone who doesn't understand what has happened here. And I think Charleston is smack in the center of this. That's my sense of it.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** And the work we do now has to do with that, as well. You know? So, it appeals to people that want to see things not change in a way, so there is a lot of that. I mean, you know? You come on vacation, you don't come to think. It's attractive, it was an attractive city; it's not anymore I don't think. And you see plantation everywhere you see slim... slave... slave, no, there is, we don't talk about that here. We don't. That's not part of our history. It's not serious. But I think that's part of the appeal, obviously it is, it's got to be. Or what is the appeal nowadays of Charleston, which are destroyed? It's landscape, completely. I don't, I don't see it.

**TM:** In what ways has the landscape been destroyed, that you've seen?

**JMM:** Well, just look around. You go to King Street or Meeting Street, whatever it was before, it was a provincial town. When we came, there was nothing in this city, you know? We saw something in it because it was... it was walkable... there was a heart to the city. Now the heart of the city for what was around Broad Street. You know, that was I don't know. Yeah, it was around there. Above Broad and below Calhoun, you know something like that.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** And Broad was this business street. What was I saying? Yeah, you cannot touch Broad Street. You cannot touch below Broad. You cannot touch three blocks above, but as soon as you can touch, you just destroy. I mean, they built apartment blocks that you cannot even find it in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh, they do better job in Pittsburgh than here, by far, by far. And I know what I'm talking about, I was in architecture before. You see what they're doing in New York as well. You might not appreciate with their.. with their contemporary architecture, but by God, they're

trying something. You know? This is a shape, basically. I mean, the buildings they build on King Street are just, it's just amazing what they're doing. Nobody can defend that. I... I... I defy anybody to defend what they're doing, nobody, except money. Money, money, money.

**TM:** Sure

**JMM:** So that's... that's what I mean by city the being attractive. No, it's not attractive anymore, except for some Disney... Disney World type building that they paint over five, every five minutes to make shiny. This is all a fake. It's a fake, I think. I'm afraid so.

**TM:** Sure.

**JMM:** I don't, I don't affirm it. But I am afraid it's... it's true, anyway.

**TM:** So in your memory, is there a specific time when things drastically changed?

**JMM:** I guess so. I think in the last fifteen years... maybe when they start building. You know, when they start changing the codes until they... until the day they decided they couldn't build up, and destroy some buildings. I think it made a big change, but I know in my days, in the '80's, early, when we tried to put there a... what was I gonna say?... yeah, we went... because we needed to put a sign up or something... you already had signage ordinances, and stuff like that. We went to this city meeting, as, a city council meeting, and they were talking about building the aquarium. That was the end of the '80's, I think. And, the Mayor was there. Representatives of the Ansonborough Project, a little project, where the aquarium and all that stuff is now. It was an African American project... a representative of the black people came and demanded some answers, "You're going to put an aquarium there? So downtown, our tourist area is on the other side of us. What's going to happen in between?" And Joe Riley looked at them in the eyes and said, "Tourists will love to walk through your beautiful neighborhood and go to the aquarium!" I mean, this was not something, you know, it's a joke, really. Six months later, they were... respectfully asked to leave... So I think that's what maybe started to think 1990, '88, '89. It was a big lie that they would keep the people that built the city, in a way, in place to operate... to enjoy the wealth. It's not true. They don't do it. They still keep kicking them out. The city was 50, 51, 51/49 racial... black-white... I think when we came. Now it's like 30/70, if that. I don't know.

**TM:** Wow.

**JMM:** Yeah! I mean, some black people owned their building, and... every day they receive a letter saying, "Sell me your building! Sell me your building!" You know? They are being pushed out basically. So I guess that's an answer to your question. I mean... It's a very unfair city, run by a bunch of supremacist... people. I'm not saying supremacist... how do you call that? Racist and

enraged racist folks, but people with entrenched privileges that they will not give up. They won't, unless we sell it for a lot of money. That's what tourism is... it's fine with me.

**TM:** Do you know... do you see trends in tourism month to month, or year to year?

**JMM:** Did you see?

**TM:** Trends in tourism month to month or year to year?

**JMM:** Oh yeah, well, maybe not anymore.

**TM:** Okay.

**JMM** Less and less. I don't work in the business anymore. But less and less I'm sure. It's a year round thing. When we first came obviously Spoleto was a big peak, because there was also a peak with the... garden tours.

And house tours. I think it was in March, and September, the nicest months in Charleston, not as hot at the time, anyway. It was March and September, October, so those were three big pieces. So winter was pretty dead, you know? But then, as tourism started to pick up in Charleston, because who else is wait, America was going up, you know? At the expense of other people, the city became much more year round tourism oriented. And that's [what] killed it, to sell for it. Too bad.

**TM:** Well, do you have any favorite places in Charleston that you like to go? That you've seen change over the years?

**JMM:** You see I've been here for 34, 35, whatever years. To me, I was in France last week, and it's... I shouldn't say that because it's not, it's not a judgment on Charleston. Charleston can't do anything about that. It's still a very provincial city, and... I'm from a big town. I lived in New York. I lived in Paris. I lived in... not much... Montreal. In big cities, big cities, that's what attracts me. So Charleston doesn't have, doesn't have that. It's for retirees, many with money. Favorite place? Not, not really. Besides Fast and French, of course. 19 Broad Street. No, not really. I think, it's provincial. It's, there is not enough of a...a whiff of culture you can have in this city. There was one for sure. It's gone. It's gone. You have to go to Goose Creek to find it. Maybe. No, I don't know. You know what I mean? I mean, New York is terrible. But it's what it is. It's a powerful town. Charleston could have been that. It's not. I don't think. Just, it's just an entertainment city, you know? And there is no, I can see ten movies a day if I want, I don't need to see Charleston. It's a bad movie basically.

**TM:** Do you think that is because of people? Like, just the whole environment of people in the city?

**JMM:** I think it's a big part [in] real estate. That it's... that it's a city run by real estate.

This is the worst thing you can do to... to citizens. You know? None of, I'm sure that very few of the people that invest all that damn money in the city are from here at all, and they don't give a hoot, don't care. It's a big responsibility... most responsible people are the Mayor's, City Councils. Whoever has a responsibility... everybody else is just, you cannot talk anyway, you know?

**TM:** Sure. Alrighty.

**JMM:** You're going to regret it. I can tell you're, you're going to regret this interview.

**TM:** No, I'm open to listening.

**JMM:** Good. That's good.

**TM:** I'm really excited to have your opinion because I know Fast and French has been open for so long. And it's also nice to hear the history. I didn't know that it was originally an art installation, which I think is really cool.

**JMM:** Yeah? Okay good.

**TM:** Have you changed the menu over time, at all?

**JMM:** No.

**TM:** No?

**JMM:** I mean. we did not. We added stuff that was, that's what, we're not professionals in the business still, although we did a lot of work in it. But we didn't go to school and we didn't learn. That's one thing we didn't learn how to, as you say, change, change the menu. It's something I'm incapable of doing, for some reason. I don't know why, but we never did. Jennifer who was running the place now, definitely makes huge efforts. Jennifer, and now Laurence, to come up with new ways, new approaches, like they put the tip included now completely. You see the price on the menus that's what you pay, which is fair. Which is I mean, that's the way it should be because when you get a, a salad for five bucks or ten bucks you see they have eleven percent of tax, city tax in the city. I think it's eleven percent now, plus a tip, which is at least fifteen percent. So you add certain twenty five or thirty percent to your bill, and you don't even know it. So what they did is just choose to add that, so you pay what you see. I mean it's a great, it's a great... how do you call that? Decision to make because it changes your price, obviously, and people have to understand that what they're doing is being honest in a way, you know? You go to

a restaurant, on East Bay, oh 20 dollars for a, you know, lacquered duck, ooo boy. But at the end it's 55, right? Because as they charge you this, they charge you for that, I never understood how they could do that, so that I'm not a pro.

**TM:** Sure. Well, during your ownership of Fast and French, so the menu items stayed the same, but did you change the prices?

**JMM:** As little as possible

**TM:** Okay.

**JMM:** I feel it's possible, you see, you have to, you have to survive, so, but we never bought vault, how do you call that? Cadillacs, and, uh, BMW's, that's something we, we didn't think it was part of the deal. So we were trying to stay very cheap. Which, which was your question again, exactly? I think it's interesting.

**TM:** So you've been open since 1984, and under the time that you owned Fast and French, did you change the prices of the menu?

**JMM:** Yeah, of course. Yeah, we change the prices, according to I mean, inflation, for one thing. But I think we're lucky enough being totally innocent when we started the business. We structured the price of the items on the menu so that there would be... I don't remember if it was five or ten percent buffer, when we computed the price something that cost you a dollar, we would charge a dollar. I mean, you would charge, I mean there are food costs. 1 dollar, 3 dollars, if you want to survive. It multiplied by 3. I mean, grossly. Then you, we added in the price, 10 percent inflation and 5 percent waste, or something like that. So we build this cushion that, I'm sure that restaurants don't do because they don't think. You know? I said it for 50, you know, but true, if they don't have price structures, they don't [know] what they're doing. We knew what we were doing there. We were a good at that, because it's easy, it's simple. So we didn't have to change the prices so drastically, and I think that they still do that. I don't know, I don't know what they do now, but I hope [they] do. Anyway, so we change the price, but according to very, very conservative, pattern.

**TM:** So this is going to swing a little bit to a different side. What are your involvements with nature? Do you ever go outside, and go to the beach? Or, what do you think about...

**JMM:** Nature? Nature?

**TM:** What do you think about the temperature here?

**JMM:** Well, yeah, I mean again, we can talk about nature in Charleston, of course, that's what we're talking about, right? Fast and French is not really good at nature. There is not many plants

there. It's very boxed in.

**TM:** No, like yourself, in Charleston.

**JMM:** Oh, yourself? Yeah, yeah, but I mean we... the way we designed that place obviously was geared to nature. It was a very urban place. Nope, no windows, nothing. We didn't care about that. Nowadays when I told people at the Fast and French... new one... is if you want to invest in something go buy a farm, and open yourself to nature. So that's my relation to nature. I'm an urban being. If I'm in town I don't expect to see a tree, but dammit if I want to see a tree... going to go out and see it, you know? And relationship to nature in Charleston for 20 years with Gywlene, my partner. Who you're going to interview, right?

**TM:** Yes.

**JMM:** Yes, you should. We rode the Ashley River 3 times a week for at least 10 years, and the next 10 years maybe 2 times a week, about the roll, big rolling, you know? With the new Charleston... the new Charleston Mosquito Fleet, which still exists but we quit because we're too old. It's too exhausting, but it's a beautiful nature. I can tell you six o'clock in the morning...

**TM:** Wow

**JMM:** Splendid, no beautiful, really. So nature is important, yeah. But if you're a citizen, I mean if you're a city person, you cannot expect nature everywhere. There is hardly, although, in Paris now, it has nothing to do with it, but it does, in Paris, if you, if you live on the street, which is tree lined, lined with trees, tree lined.. you get a permit from the city, and you can plant wide flowers around the tree, so you go to Paris, you see those wheat and wildflowers, and the smell of Paris has changed completely. That's amazing! So that, Charleston should do that. That would be smart.

**TM:** That would be smart.

**JMM:** I don't think they're very smart.

**TM:** That could be something to bring together the community, too.

**JMM:** Yeah, that would be, I mean, really, it's amazing. It's a little sloppy, you know, because weeds, but they are nature. Yeah, okay, so that's it. That's my answer to nature, I guess.

**TM:** Have you experienced any hurricanes during your time here?

**JMM:** Of course. I'm waiting for another one, not waiting for the other one, I'm afraid for the other one.

'89. '89, right? Hugo. Yeah, we were here. We closed the cafe. I think it happened on a Thursday afternoon, a Thursday night. I was in the cafe until 4, 5 o'clock in the afternoon because we never closed, except Sunday, of course. Anyway, and we were reopened, and Gywlene, and we tell you, if you ask her, she'll tell you to start about that, so I won't tell it way. We reopened day and a half later. People had no money. The atms were not working, banks were closed, everything was closed. We were not giving money, but we're giving food away, you know? And that's something people never forgot, that lived there at the time. They never forgot that Fast and French was a place where you could go, and the place was packed! All the restaurants were gone. We were open, and people would come from out of town and bring us stuff. I can remember from Asheville, Asheville friends brought us tons of bread and stuff like that. And people would bring, um, how you call those? Coleman stoves, right?

**TM:** Oh sure. Yeah, they're like...

**JMM:** They're named like this? Yeah, so would do the food, in those, on those things, and we would use the foamed in pots to cook, the... whatever we had in the freezer, because if you didn't cook it, you lose it, you know? So Hurricane, we lived through Hurricane, yeah. Cafe was not touched. So that's obvious. So there was no electricity but Gywlene will tell you an anecdote on this. Which is what? Something to remember. But it was very, uh, the Charleston... roofs of Charleston where 75% percent gone. That's, that's what they say. 75% percent of the roof of a city, we're, we're on the ground, on the streets. Amazing, and there is a picture in the *Post and Courier* for the day after the Hurricane where, Gywlene again, she's biking around town, going down to check the cafe and she's shot in front of the market, the back of the market, which was a total ruin, when buildings, it just collapsed. It's a beautiful picture, anyway. Yeah, we saw the Hurricane. And we hope there's no more of those, because anyway.

**TM:** What about recent hurricanes? Have you been here the past couple years?

**JMM:** None of them has been so, so powerful as Hugo. Not that I know. I don't remember, really. Nope

**TM:** Hugo was just...

**JMM:** Hugo was, was it. There is another one, I forgot the name of it, which was pretty powerful. But it was nothing like, nothing like Hugo, which destroyed the city and 6 months later people were still putting things out. But, you know, Hugo, that's an answer to that question before. When Hugo hit the people that didn't have insurance, placebo, so lot of black people lost it. That was the start... A lot of white people with little money couldn't rebuild their loss. But people with good insurance, the city rebuild the city for them. As a city, the insurance company's rebuilt the city for them. The city has never been as beautiful and clean as since Hugo. That's true. So Hugo did something to Charleston, which is destroy it, and destroyed it a second time.



You know, by making it the Mecca of tourism it is. Just making it beautiful. Yeah, I think that's true, that's what Hurricane did. Hugo, anyway.

**TM:** Sure. You said you're fearing something? Do you think that, you said you fear another hurricane? Is there a particular reason why?

**JMM:** Is there a particular...

**TM:** Reason why you fear another hurricane?

**JMM:** Oh, yeah, I do. That's, one of the reasons, I mean, one of the reasons that I would if I could, I would leave the city for sure. I think it must be terrible to lose what you have into a hurricane. That would be tough. That's a tough, tough one. Yeah, and there is nothing the City can do, so, no it's tough. I am very fearful of that, yes, but you know there is nothing you can do.

**TM:** Did you see any changes in the tourism industry afterwards? After the Hurricane?

**JMM:** Towards what?

**TM:** In tourism... you saw, saw some changes?

**JMM:** I mean, I'm sure the city, I don't remember exactly, but the city was really, really hit so hard that I'm sure tourism was hit as well, at the time. But as I was saying earlier, where there was money, they just rebuild the city like a... like a museum... like you see it below Broad, some parts of Ansonborough, whatever. Where it's pristine and the College of Charleston didn't do a very good job there. It could have... could have done much better. It became like, I think it didn't, it has nothing... to do with that. I see that there is this NoMo? Is that called NoMo?

**TM:** NoMo.

**JMM:** NoMo?

**TM:** The first, the first prominent student complex off campus.

**JMM:** Yeah, which is a reflection of what Charleston has become, which is a luxury city, a city of leisure. And they sold us, what do you call it? Nolo? Noho?

**TM:** NoMo.

**JMM:** NoMo? They sold us NoMo as a luxury apartment set up for students. I think this is a very disservice to the city and to [the] College. The shuttle between, really you know? I think

this is a perfect reflection of Charleston has become. Totally privileged city. That answer your question?

**TM:** Yeah.

**JMM:** Yeah, that's really too bad they didn't do a good job there. They should have. There should have been an intelligent center for... for the reconstruction of the city. Anyway, that's it?

**TM:** Some of the last thoughts, and the final questions. What is your vision for the future of Charleston, and does tourism kind of play a role in it?

**JMM:** Hey listen I don't know. But what I can say is that we have enough, we have enough, it's not faith, but enough, not faith, not hope but enough... what does it take to survive? Or to make with the best of what you have? What did you call that? I don't know? Gumption? It's not gumption? What is... I don't know what is it?

**TM:** Optimism?

**JMM:** Hmm?

**TM:** Optimism, maybe?

**JMM:** Maybe. I don't think that's what is it for me, but anyway... you'd name it. The project, the art project we have right now has to do with Charleston in the way it can be. It can be, it can be kept at a certain level of humanity, despite its privilege thanks to the survival of some tiny businesses local owned by local people, whether are black or white or yellow whenever it doesn't matter. Most black people have been hit hard, as have a lot of tiny businesses. We're trying, with this project, we have to help just know, forget the word help, to support, we don't help. We're not helpers. We're makers, to support, the survival and revival of the spirit of tiny businesses in this city. That's a project we got a big grant for... and we were working on it right now.

**TM:** Could you explain a bit more about that project?

**JMM:** It's called *ConNECKtedTOO*. C,o,n capital N, E, C, K, T, E, D, T, O, O capital. It relates to a project we had last year, a year ago at the city Galleria Waterfront Park, which was called *Connected*, which was really... in praise of community. It lasted 3 months. 1 month and 1 month and a half there's no visitors but interns and artists working on the... on the site, and then a month and a half off open gallery, and there was no end to it because we're still working at it now outside the gallery and now it has to do with *ConNECKtedTOO*, and it has to do is developing a spirit of solidarity, of empathy, of whatever the city needs, you know? And I'm not bragging, but the city needs it, so we're doing it. So it has involved a lot of minorities, and we got our ArtPlace America grant, 300,000 dollars.

**TM:** Wow, congratulations!

**JMM:** I mean, not to do anything we want. To do a really too serious job about...

**TM:** Community?

**JMM:** Community work, you know? And actually we have a hard time finding good people to work with us because we have the money to pay people, but I suppose the city is not used to this kind of treatment, so we don't have anyone right now. We're looking for serious people to be organizers, to be artist in the artists, not in residence, but on duty and something like that, to be coordinators. We need a bunch of people like that from the city. We're grassroots. This is a grassroots project, but it's not easy because obviously the citizens of the city are not used to being asked to work for their city. I mean, you know? This is weird.

Anyway, we're getting there. So yeah... So your question was the future of Charleston? We're betting, we're betting on the future of Charleston. I'll put it this way, we do what we can.

**TM:** Alrighty, one of the final questions that have for you, so this interview will be a collection of oral histories, and since we are developing an oral history project, do you have any hopes for your involvement in it and for the project itself to make an impact or to...

**JMM:** Do I have any hopes? Yeah I hope that, I mean any, at this point in my life or in my career as an artist any time have a chance to be clear about the goals I believe in, I will, I will do it and will take advantage of the situation, and yes clear as possible, and Gylwene would be the same way for sure. She has a totally different approach, vision, language but will not hesitate to call a cat a cat and gangster a gangster. So there's a lot of hope, and we have seen that that's why I asked oral project, there are a lot of those. NPR is running one, has been running one for years. So I think it's great. It doesn't, it cannot remain a bunch of stories. It has... it has to itself have the citizen oriented future. It cannot be like a museum piece, there's no way. I mean we do interviews for *ConNECKtedTOO*. What a lot of interviews. But it has to have a purpose, other than memory. It has to build history. I mean, the history of tomorrow in Charleston, it has to do that, or else who cares? Really, you know? So there is hope, as long as you use that... that tool as a builder of hope for people in history, for the city. It needs it.

**TM:** Do you have any last things that you like to add at the end?

**JMM:** No, not really. I mean, I think it was interesting, and my hope is that good words from anybody are very important because people don't have enough of a voice in this city. They don't [have] enough voice. I mean, I can tell many stories about that. You have a meeting here. It has been moved to their, you know, it's not decided at this time. I'm working, you know, I cannot go to a meeting, I'm working, I'm working. It's at noon. I mean, you know, the damn meeting is that

no one who is going to go to a meeting at noon, who is working? Nobody. This is old politics. It's really bad, anyway. Forget it, that's it.

**TM:** Thank you so much for sitting down with me today, it's been a pleasure.