Voices of Southern Hospitality: An Oral History Project

Interviewee: Downs, Bambi
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Abstract: In this interview, Bambi Downs recalls her childhood on the islands and in downtown Charleston. She gives details on the forgotten rituals and actions of the old Charleston, including food carts, Christmas tree forts, and playing Swamp Fox in the woods. Then Ms. Downs gives her opinion on how tourism has played a part in changing the landscape of her home and how different people have reacted to the influx of tourists in recent years. She tells of the gender-separated activities that were prevalent when she was growing up; men belonged to clubs and worked various jobs while women belonged to flower guilds and didn't work at all. She talks about what manners and customs define Southern hospitality in general and specifically in Charleston. Near the end, Ms. Downs describes her favorite Southern food staples and how tourists have influenced the food scene.

Biographical Note: Bambi Downs, born in 1958, grew up on Clark Sound until she was nine years old. Then her family moved downtown and lived on lower Church Street a block from the Battery. Her childhood activities include crabbing, fishing, playing in the woods, building tree forts, and eating fresh, Southern food for breakfast. She has had a career in food and beverage, hotels, and intercultural relations. She has also been exposed to different cultures thanks to her grandparents, who led study abroad tours, when she was young, and she finally traveled herself ones she was in her twenties. She is currently an administrative assistant at the College of Charleston School of Languages, Cultures, and World Affairs[1].

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.

Interview Begin

[Interviewer Initials]: A.G.
Interviewee Initials]: B.D.

AG: Okay. I'm sitting here with Bambi Downs on July 12th, 2018, and I guess we'll get right into it. So, how long has your family lived in Charleston?

BD: I moved here with my family when I was three. My father and his family had lived here previously. When he was growing up, his father was in the Navy as an encoder, and he was stationed at the Citadel. He was the Chair of Romance Languages at University of Georgia. But during the war, he was down here as a cryptologist, I guess. And so, my father grew up here, but then they went back to Athens later and then after kids were born, we came back to Charleston.

[1] See http://lcwa.cofc.edu/contact-us/index.php

AG: So, where did you grow up in Charleston?

BD: I grew up on... Very interesting. My very earliest years were on Clark Sound, which is right off James Island. And that was really spent crabbing and fishing and swimming and running wild in the woods and having a great time. And then when I was about nine, we moved downtown and I lived a block up from the Battery on lower Church Street, the brick part of Church Street. And that was about as night and day from this nice, running wild shrimping, crabbing, fishing. And then all of a sudden I'm downtown, debutante yacht club. So, both are part of my growing up.

AG: What are your earliest memories of Charleston or off the peninsula or just anything really?

BD: Really, my earliest memories probably are more associated with growing up downtown. And we had things then that people can't even imagine. I've had many people say they can't believe, "Really? You grew up with that?" We had... I don't know if you knew. They were vendors of shrimp; they had little wooden carts that they pushed through the streets. And this was in the 60s; that late. So, we had a shrimp man, we called him, and he'd come around on Saturday mornings and my mom would leave change, not dollar bills, but coins on the kitchen counter. And if you woke up early enough and you could hear the shrimp man calling--you know, he was a black Southern Gullah. You could hear him say "Shrimp here! Shrimp here!" And if you got up and ran downstairs and got the change and ran out, you could get shrimp and grits for breakfast. Mom would fix it. And we also had a vegetable lady with a cart. And I just remember all the windows being open. We didn't have A/C. We had the sea breeze from the Battery. So, those are good Southern memories of growing up downtown. Hard to believe.

AG: Yeah. So, what did you do for fun growing up? Like, so say when you were a little kid, you know, like seven to 12, what would you do for fun?

BD: Those early years on James Island, basically playing Swamp Fox in the woods. Seriously. You know the Swamp Fox?

AG: No.

BD: Oh, Francis Marion.

AG: Oh yeah.

BD: He's a war general. And I wasn't the only kid who played Swamp Fox in the woods. The woods were really thick and there were lots of vines that hung down from the trees. And me, my brothers, and the neighborhood kids, we'd all swing on the vines, and the vines actually for some reason had water dripping out of them. So, we had quite an imaginary time with our swinging on the vines, playing in the woods, finding old Civil War cemeteries in the woods and making up ghost stories and pretending to be hobos. So.

AG: Wow. Sounds kind of magical.

BD: It was extremely magical. And actually, my kids say I gave them a magical childhood as a result. So.

AG: That's awesome. So, as you got older and you were down in the peninsula, where'd you go to socialize? Like where'd you and your friends go?

BD: Well, growing up downtown was very different than anything you can see now. Tourism really didn't start here, and you'll probably get into those questions later. It didn't really start here until about 1970. So, we never saw tourists, and we just went barefoot downtown, running around to our friends' houses. There was no traffic, no parking restrictions. We walked everywhere that we wanted to go. All of our friends lived right there. We had Christmas tree forts at Christmas. Ever heard of Christmas tree forts? You take your Christmas trees, everybody's Christmas trees, and you build big forts out of them, pile them all up in our backyards downtown and then you fight neighbors and you take captive and try to steal their trees. This is--

AG: And this is all downtown?

BD: Anybody who grew up downtown will tell you stories about Christmas tree forts.

AG: Oh wow.

BD: Yeah, it was a big deal.

AG: Was that just a Charleston thing or was that--?

BD: Just a Charleston thing. Somebody must've come up with it, but even people's dads remember doing it. So, you know, behind these beautiful old walls or these beautiful houses, you'd see Christmas tree forts. Like if you were really good, they'd be up over the walls. That meant you had captured enough trees from other people to have great forts.

AG: That's fun. Did you raise your children in Charleston?

BD: No. In fact... Well, kind of. I was gone for 30 years, and I came back then about 13 years ago. So, my sons grew up here from age seven. They were seven and 11 when we came back to Charleston.

AG: What brought your family back here?

BD: Unfortunate situation. Their father just up and left one day after 25 years of marriage. And that was a huge surprise. So, I remember visiting many times and seeing my high school friends and thinking, "Oh, I wish I still lived in Charleston." I got my wish. Not quite the circumstances I would have wanted, but it ended up being wonderful--a wonderful thing that I could raise my children here in Charleston. I never thought I'd be able to do that. And now I can truly say they're Charleston gentlemen.

AG: Right. Do you think their socializing as they were teenagers resembled sort of what you and your generation did for fun and for going out? Does that make sense? Like with debutante balls and things like that.

BD: No. (laughs) No, it was very different even by that time. I had my children very late in life. I had my first one when I was 38 and my second child when I was 41. So, you know, I'm what they would call an older mother. And since I had them so late, you know, they were basically born around 2000, very little looked the same in Charleston. Very little was still going on here like it did when I was young. You couldn't walk everywhere. There is a lot of tourism. There's no place to park. Kids drive everywhere. You know, social media and iPhones. I'd say it doesn't look a lot like it did in their childhood.

AG: So, do you think... So, just going into tourism, the influx of people, do you think that the influx people to the peninsula has made the city safer or do you think it has just changed the general atmosphere in the city? Like, that is to say, are there certain areas of the city that you used to avoid that are now sort of popular with tourists?

BD: Oh yeah. I mean it's really kind of funny that we were not allowed--I mean, growing up basically at the Battery, we were not allowed to go beyond Broad Street. So, that's what? About four blocks, three blocks north on the peninsula? And then gradually, as I got older, when I was a teenager, we could not go north of Calhoun. I went to high school at Ashley Hall, which is basically at Calhoun Street. So, that was as far north as we could go. And now when I see the activity, like, you know, the nightlife on upper King Street, you know, it's like New York, you know. I've been there at 2:00, 3:00 in the morning. It's really fun. It's really fun. But gosh, so much different.

AG: And do you think... So, I mean, the city's just sort of bigger now. Obviously, there's more people. Do you think that influx of people has affected the community of Charleston or do you think people aren't as tight knit anymore?

BD: They're definitely not as tight knit. You know, I will say at the outset, I'm not one of these people who's down on the tourism in Charleston. And that's unusual for somebody raised on the peninsula. Tourism has brought us a lot of things we never would have had. We would never have had the restaurants that we have now. We would never be on the national food map. We wouldn't have, you know, chefs like Sean Brock and people like that; James Beard award winners. We wouldn't have any of that if we hadn't brought in the tourism that we have.

AG: Right. So, do you think that the city's changed--like the culture of the city has changed--as a result of these new people?

BD: Yeah. Everybody I grew up with, and I got back just in time to see the last... I mean, basically what happened was the large homes were subdivided into condominiums and then the condominiums were when people couldn't maintain that anymore. My peers that I grew up with, they kept their homes as bed and breakfasts. And I actually did a stint as a bed and breakfast resident manager when I first came back for a local girl I went to high school with. And then just taxes to sustain the tourism and all the influx--people had to start getting rid of their family homes. Almost no one--I can think of maybe one or two people I grew up with who still live on the

peninsula. We all had to move out to the islands. James Island, Johns Island, where I live now.

AG: That's really interesting.

BD: Nobody. And so, those beautiful houses are... I could get off on a tangent about what made all this happen. Basically Hugo, I think, and, you know, FEMA. FEMA came in. There was so much wrong with these houses since the Civil War. Nobody in Charleston ever had any money. We just had antiques and family silver and beautiful houses, but we couldn't afford to maintain them, and we never could. They just pass from generation to generation. And when Hugo hit--this is all my opinion--FEMA comes in with all kinds of money. All of a sudden, every house on the peninsula has a blue tarp on the roof. And somehow, you know, we need granite countertops to repair what Hugo did and we need this, and we need that. And we overbuilt ourselves. So, we taxed ourselves out of our own homes, in my opinion. I'm sure people would argue with me. And we can't live there anymore. And so, these houses are now bought by people coming in from big cities. I mean, I know people here from Ohio, Chicago, New York who purchased all of these family homes, and they don't have the culture. People will tell you, "Oh, they don't have any culture at all," but they have a different culture than what we grew up with in this small, intimate South of Broad community. It's very, very different. You can't leave the garden gate open anymore, which is a sign that people are welcome to come in and view your garden. Now, people actually build over their gates so you can't see inside their gardens. They put padlocks on the garden gates. They don't come to call like they did. There's no shrimp man or vegetable lady either. So, it's very different.

AG: And so, you said Hugo right?

BD: Yeah. Hurricane Hugo.

AG: That was like, what, 20, 30 years ago?

BD: '89.

AG: So, that would mean that was relatively recently in the past, basically a generation ago. Things are still relatively how they used to be in Charleston. So, it's all sort of happened pretty rapidly, I'd say, right?

BD: Since 1970, I mean, I'd say in that 20 years from 1970 to 1990, I'd seen massive change in the community feeling, the culture or lack thereof of some of the residents. It's a totally different culture. And people here who grew up here don't like it. And they're largely really down on, you know--they hate tourists. They hate people from Ohio. They hate people from New York and Chicago. And I guess given my field, which is intercultural relations, I understand the cultural difference. They're not bad people, they're different people. And change is change.

AG: Right. It happens. So, you mentioned 1970 a few times. So, since 1970, how has the industry changed? Like, the tourism industry that is.

BD: Oh gosh. We had one cruise ship. I remember when it started coming to town. It was so exciting. My girlfriend's grandparents, you know, would go on the cruise and so we got to--you could bring a visitor when it was time to board. So, we went down like the first cruise ship. We got to go and go on board. And it was so exciting. You know, maybe that came around, like, once or twice a year. Now every week the cruise ships come in and I don't think you probably can't go on board and visit with your grandma anymore. I don't think. But at the same time, it's super exciting to see all these people from different places.

AG: I mean, were there any... You know you see the horse and buggies out all the time. Was there anything like that when you were a little girl growing up in Charleston?

BD: There was one horse and buggy.

AG: There was one?

BD: One. Mr. Wagner. Everybody knows Mr. Wagner, who's long gone now. He had one carriage, and you could rent it out like for a wedding or something like that. But he'd drive it around town and on summer evenings, he didn't mind. We could run behind him and jump on the backboard and ride.

AG: So, he was sort of the only game in town?

BD: He was the only--there was no other horse carriage. Just Mr. Wagner. And it wasn't for tourists, it was for weddings and things like that. And he liked to let the little kids ride on it.

AG: That sounds fun.

BD: It was super fun.

AG: And was the influx of tourists pretty gradual or did it happen relatively quickly?

BD: Well, you know, I was very interested, of course, growing up here as to how this happened. And I vividly remember the first tourists I ever saw. I grew up at 38 Church Street, which is down on the brick portion; to me, the prettiest part of Charleston. And I remember, for the first time, seeing people standing in front of my house. And my room was on the third floor. My brothers were in the dormer attic rooms on the fourth floor. And we stood up there on the porch and looked out and saw people staring at our house. And we thought, if you can try to imagine no tourism, we thought this was the rudest thing. What were these people doing gaping at our house? I mean, just imagine your house. What if, all of a sudden, where you lived when you were 12 years old, you looked down and saw people just gaping at your house, you know, peering in the gate and everything? So, we took a bucket of water, and we poured it on their heads. We got in trouble. (laughing)

AG: Speak of Southern hospitality.

BD: Yeah, maybe not too hospitable, but we thought they were horribly rude. And I forgot your original question.

AG: That's interesting.

BD: Oh, it had to do with when tourism started.

AG: Right. Yeah.

BD: My understanding, I mean, I started reading about it and the closest thing I could find was apparently in the early 70s. I want to say '72 or '73, there was an article published in the New York Times about Charleston, a travel article. And whomever it was that wrote this--and I found all this online, so I can't really give you a citation--they said, "Oh, Charleston's the most charming place. You've got to go visit. It's just amazing. Undiscovered." After that article came out, it wasn't undiscovered for long. They all started coming, and it was very sudden. And I can't tie it all directly to that article, but based on my limited research, I think that had something to do with it.

AG: I think it makes sense. Sounds like my grandfather would've been sitting in Manhattan, 70s, probably flipping through his magazine, read that, and, "Let's go to Charleston."

BD: Just like Condé Nast now says, Travel + Leisure says, everybody says, "Come to Charleston."

AG: So, you've sort of touched on this, but how do long-term residents as a whole feel about the tourism industry?

BD: They hate it. I mean, it's sad. You know, I was a closet liberal in high school. I guess I came out of the closet when I turned 60 this year, you know. And that's really why I left Charleston. It was too provincial for me. It was too racist for me. It was too conservative for me. So, I went out, you know, went to Europe, lived all over the United States. West Coast, north, south, east, west. I've basically been everywhere, and that helped to develop my interest in intercultural studies and my graduate work in that field. And then I came back when I was, you know, late 40s to Charleston, bringing with me all of that exposure and feeling about other cultures, other people. And I found all my friends from high school, many of them, not all of them, but many of them still here, still entrenched in that, you know, "What's happened to my city? Why isn't it the same? Everything's changed." You know, "These tourists come in with their..." And these are the same ones who are pulling up a table, you know, at Sean Brock's restaurant, enjoying that good food. They're the ones who own bookstores and shops and, you know, all kinds of things where people go and buy, spend their money. So, you know, largely, a good number of the people I grew up with are very unhappy about it.

AG: And so, I guess you're sort of touching on the fact that tourism has brought a lot of economic benefit to the city, and it's benefiting the long-term residents, but they just don't necessarily recognize that?

BD: You know, I think if you asked them, I think they would admit it. I mean, they're not stupid. But that doesn't mean they have to like it. You know, I think they would--many people would rather it go back just like it used to be. But you know, that's naive. I

mean, change is going to happen. It's not going to be the same as it was when our great grandparents were here or even our grandparents or even our parents. It's a different world. And I find that exciting and challenging. I would say that the, you know, you kind of just summed it up that, you know, given the tourism, given the increase in all the support services for tourism here, it's changed the economy and it's changed the culture. The culture is not what it was.

AG: And this is sort of an aside, but so you said you've always been interested in culture and having traveled a lot. When you were growing up here, did you recognize at all how unique this little pocket of the South was?

BD: Well, I didn't travel when I was young. I mean, my early exposure to other cultures came from my grandparents who traveled. They led the study abroad tours at University of Georgia for 35 years. So, I kind of grew up, you know, they had tailors in Italy, and they had their watchmakers in Lucerne, and you know. Well, I had to go visit all those people when I went to Europe. I had a list this long. And first I thought, oh, what a, you know, like a typical teenager, I thought, "What a pain this will be." Instead, all my girlfriends are like, "Well, let me go with you." You know, I'm coming back with free watches and invitations for dinner and all kinds of fun things. So, you know, it's... I think I had that exposure early of knowing there were different places and different things. But, you know, I didn't really travel myself until I was, you know, 20s.

AG: Right. Okay. Interesting. Okay. So, I'm going to touch on Southern hospitality now. And I guess my first question will be just sort of broad, but what is Southern hospitality in your opinion? Like, how would you describe it to someone that's never been to the South before?

BD: Talking, just like we're doing now. Just talking. I think that's the essence of Southern hospitality. And, you know, talking incorporates lots of things. It incorporates kindness and friendliness to people, which puts them at ease. It also incorporates sharing stories, you know. I mean, we sat down here before you started recording and we started telling stories. You know, you told me a little about your story, and I told you mine. And that kind of talking puts people at ease and creates an intimacy that makes life comfortable. So, I think it all starts with talking. I'm kind of known for that, for better or worse.

AG: So, what are some mannerisms of Southern hospitality that define it? Just aside from talking. Like if someone is coming into your home, what are some things that would typically be done?

BD: First thing that comes to mind is you offer them something to drink. Then you're probably gonna offer them something to eat. First, it's probably going to be, you know, "Can I get you some sweet tea?" More often, you know, currently, it turns into offering them a cocktail or something. But usually, you know, you're just offering them a cold drink and then you offer them a meal or snack. Always food and drink. And then I think the most common thing is really offer to people to come see you. You know, "Come see me." You know, "Let's get together. Come see me."

AG: Are there any things about Charleston that you've noticed are unique in regards to hospitality, things that you find in Charleston that you don't find anywhere else?

BD: Currently? Or in the old days?

AG: Or in the old days, I guess.

BD: Oh gosh, in the old days I can name hundreds that don't exist anymore. I mean, the story I told earlier about the garden gate, did you know that?

AG: I did not know that.

BD: Oh, and it's still a thing even from people who have moved, as we say, from off. Do you know these terms?

AG: No.

BD: Oh, this is how native Charlestonians referred to people. We say they're "from off." That means they didn't grow up here with us.

AG: So, like off the peninsula?

BD: No, I mean off like not even close to Charleston. From way far away. They're not like us. "From off" means really from off, you know. From New York, Chicago, Ohio; they're from off. And then the other two terms you hear are "been yeres". "Been yere" means been here and so there are "been yeres" and there are "come yeres", people

that have come here. And you hear that all the time. I mean if you go down to the yacht club, you know like we're one of the last bastions of South of Broad society. You're sitting at the back bar, which is the more casual place and people are talking about, "Oh yeah," you know, "he's a come yere", "they're from off." I mean, basically that means a lot of things: doesn't have manners, doesn't know how to do, doesn't know our traditions. But that's a lot of people nowadays. So, the things we grew up with, I mean, you know, when the garden gate's open--and everybody knew this and it was in that New York Times article in the 70s--if the garden gate's open, you're invited to come in and view the garden. That's something that's always been part of Charleston since time began. The other traditions of--this is kind of fun 'cause I bet you don't know half of these or any of them.

AG: Yeah, I don't know any of these. It's interesting.

BD: You know... I mean you know what Charleston houses look like. And most of what we call Charleston single houses--and they're called that because they're just a single room wide and they're turned sideways to the street and they have a piazza, like, a porch on the front. Right? And you probably noticed even in this building where we are now, you open that piazza door and you walk onto the porch, right. And then there's the front door. Did you ever wonder about that?

AG: I've just always found it so eclectic the Charleston.

BD: There's a reason for it.

AG: What is it?

BD: If the outer door is open, the one on the street, that means the lady of the house is receiving. Receiving means you can come to call. You can pay her a visit. And in those days you came with your calling card. Like a business card, but it had the woman's name on it 'cause it was always the woman. And then the servant who answered the door would then take that on a little silver tray. You'd put your calling card on the tray. And actually, when I was coming up, that was still done. Not for very much longer, but I was on the last part of that tradition. So, if the street door is open onto the porch, that means you can come to call. If that's closed, you may not come to call.

AG: Do you have memories of that?

BD: Oh yeah. Oh, that was still definitely in effect. And it's so funny to see people now come and knock on that outer door. It's like, good luck. No one will hear you. That door doesn't connect to the house, so you have to see it to understand. But the outer door just comes on to a porch, and you know what I'm talking about. And then the door to the home is inside down the porch and that's where you actually go in.

AG: Could they say no, like they can't come in and they'd send their servant back down?

BD: No, no, because the door wouldn't be open to the street unless you were receiving.

AG: That makes sense.

BD: So, if the door to the street is open, you may come in and knock on the home door. If the door to the street is closed, you're not receiving, and you don't come in.

AG: Oh, that's so interesting.

BD: And I still find that--I mean, it's so inculcated in my growing up--I still find that really rude when I see people knocking on the outside door. I mean they have no idea what they're doing. That sounds like oh cringe. But I know that's silly because no one could know that anymore.

AG: That's so interesting. When did that stop do you think?

BD: I'd say late 60s.

AG: Late 60s?

BD: Yeah. So, I would have been, you know, I was born in '58. About the time I was probably 12.

AG: Okay. That's really interesting. And was that particular only to Charleston? Did you have that when you were out in the country?

BD: Oh no, no, that was a downtown thing. The country is just a bunch of wild hellions. Not too many manners out there. Just kids fishing and crabbing.

AG: Right. That's really interesting. So, can you tell me about some differences in Southern hospitality between a man and a woman, if any come to mind?

BD: Well, the first thing I thought of was the back bar at the yacht club. (laughs) The back bar at the yacht club. The yacht club is down on the Battery. Do you know where it is?

AG: Yeah, I've actually been there one time.

BD: Oh, okay. As you come into that parking lot, there's a little door on the left. And probably nobody even knows now that was the door to the back bar. The back bar was only for men. I mean, women couldn't be members of the yacht club anyway, and still can't to my knowledge. I'm almost certain that's still the case. But only men could ever be seen in that back bar. And I remember as a child going to try to get my dad to get me Cokes, like if I'd been sailing or something. You know, I'd come around and lurk outside the back bar door, hoping somebody would come out and I could say, "Get my dad." So, he'd get me a Shirley Temple or soda or something like that. So, the back bar at the yacht club, that was definitely men's only. Women coming to call was only something women did. And, gosh, women had flower guilds. That was a big deal. My mother was a big flower arranger.

AG: Flower gill? Is that like a bouquet kind of thing?

BD: Flower guild is a group of ladies who get together to do flower arrangements. Kind of like a flower club or garden club sort of thing. And the churches, the old episcopal churches here--of which I'm a member, my family are members--have flower guilds who are women who do the flowers for the altar. It's only women. Men... Broad Street, our main street, was filled with the offices of the men. They were lawyers. They were insurance salesmen. Those are the only things I can really remember. There were lots of insurance salesmen and lots of lawyers. And my dad was one of the insurance salesmen, but he had his own unique company, which he started called The Physicians Company that sold insurance to doctors at the medical university. So, it was very specialized. But every man had his shingle out and at 2:00 dinner... Do you know about this?

AG: No.

BD: Oh, this is so fun. Teaching you this stuff. At 2:00 dinner, everybody went home. It's kind of like what you hear in South America, like in Spain even. I guess in Spain more.

AG: I was just in Italy and they do that same thing. Everything shuts down.

BD: Yeah. Everybody shuts down, and it's called 2:00 dinner, and that's dinner. It's your big meal. Everybody goes home and Ashley Hall let out at 10 minutes to 2:00 so we could all get home in time for 2:00 dinner. And you'd come in and you're in the fancy dining room--which we, at that time, we didn't think it was fancy--and everything's laid out. You know, you'll have red snapper, five vegetables, homemade rolls, sweet tea with mint and lemon. A big deal. And then for supper you'll have cold leftovers or fried chicken that the help has left, something like that. So, that was a men's thing closing down and coming home. As time went by, people stopped having 2:00 dinner. I'd go to my dad's office sometimes and meet him and go to Henry's at the Market, which is not the same Henry's.

AG: Right. That's there now.

BD: That's where it was. But it was a very New Orleans-like restaurant where all the servers knew their patrons by name. You'd walk in, "Mr. Downs, nice to see you. Good to see your daughter." They just bring--they knew what you wanted to eat. So, that was a men's thing. And then we'd all continue and go out when we stopped having 2:00 dinner. It was very gender separated. The girls had their debuts, obviously. Gentlemen, much later, reformed--there was a young man's club, I can't remember what the name of it was, but it kind of dropped out. And I think it still... It was reformed and is still reformed. But there were a lot of societies which are only for men, too. Even now.

AG: Even now?

BD: Yeah. That have been here since the late 1700s.

AG: So, forever. So, the ladies didn't work right?

BD: No, no, no.

AG: So, it was just sort of like a--segregated is not the right word...

BD: Gender specific.

AG: Gender specific society and closed off to a lot of ladies? Or they had their own--?

BD: Well... It's so funny. I tell you like, you know, I grew up kind of more liberal-minded than a lot of my peers, but you know, we didn't think it was... I mean, we liked the things that we did, and they liked the things that they did. So, we were all happy. We didn't feel excluded.

AG: Right, 'cause you had your flower guilds and things like that.

BD: Things that we enjoyed. And it wasn't until I was much older that--and actually that my father passed away too--that I thought, well why can't I be a member of the yacht club? You know? But that sure never occurred to me until I was 40 years old.

AG: So, it was just the way it was, but it worked that way?

BD: And no one thought anything different of it, surely, until the late 70s.

AG: Yeah, much later.

BD: Much later.

AG: That's interesting. So, I want to touch on some food right now. What food dishes come to mind that are unique to the Lowcountry?

BD: Oh, God. I can talk about this one all day because I used to be in food and beverage. Red rice. Friday fried fish. There was and is still a large Catholic component here. So, a lot of restaurants had fried whiting, which is a native fish. Oh, I still love fried whiting. Red rice. Fried okra. Okra any way. Okra soup; okra soup's made with beef bones, not made with chicken or pork. And that's odd. If you look in a lot of cookbooks from other places, okra soup is never made with beef. It was a Charleston thing to have beef. Okra soup. Huguenot torte, the famous dessert. You can still get it in the spring at the church tea rooms.

AG: Sounds yummy, right?

BD: So good! Oh my gosh. It's like heaven. Nuts and lots of apples. Fried chicken is just kind of a given. I mean, nobody gets that excited about it. It's kind of like everybody's got fried chicken. Corn bread. Oysters. Gosh, anything with oysters. Shrimp. Growing up, I didn't touch red meat until I was 16 years old.

AG: Really?

BD: We just ate seafood, occasionally chicken. And it was inexpensive. It was locally available. So gosh, I mean anything with shrimp, fish, oysters. Very popular for 2:00 dinner. For anytime.

AG: And so, do you think the primarily seafood, you think those were being eaten by people in Charleston hundreds of years ago? Are those just staples of the diet down here?

BD: Oh, yeah. All those things I just named had been eaten here since the late 1600s. I mean, there's a famous Charleston cookbook, you should look it up. It's called *Charleston Receipts*.

AG: *Charleston Receipts*?

BD: Mhm. And "receipts" is spelled very differently. R-E-C-I-E-P-T-S.

AG: R-E-C...

BD: R-E-C... I before e. E-I-P-T-S.

AG: Yes. Perfect.

BD: I think that's right.

AG: I love to cook, so I'll definitely look that up.

BD: Oh, *Charleston Receipts*. It is the cookbook for which Charleston is most famous.

AG: Really?

BD: And there have been--they've done subsequent ones. *Charleston Receipts Repeats* and then one for cocktail parties. But that's the one you got to get. It's available at any bookstore.

AG: Oh, perfect.

BD: And it's just incredible. Has all of these recipes in it.

AG: I can't wait to get my hands on it. Do you think... So, when you brought your family back here, were your kids primarily eating seafood or did that change like the rest of the city?

BD: The cost of seafood is just astronomical compared to what it used to be. I mean, growing up we had a family of six. We ate seafood most every night. Now to do that would cost a mint, but it was really important to me. Even when I lived away from Charleston, it was important to me that my children know Charleston foods, and so I cooked things that they would know even from the time they were young. And when I came back to Charleston, it became equally important to me that they know Charleston culture, like I grew up, and so not only would I cook the foods, I didn't do 2:00 dinner every day, but I did it on Sunday after church. And everybody in the neighborhood came to know that's where you want to be on Sunday at 2:00 is at Bambi's house. And we'd do the whole Southern spread, so they know and appreciate good Southern food.

AG: That's awesome.

BD: Love seafood. We eat it as often as we can, but just economically, it's not quite as feasible.

AG: Yeah, it's just expensive.

BD: Very expensive.

AG: Do you think the tourism industry and the influx of people to Charleston has changed the cuisine? Like, are there any foods that have fallen out, you think?

BD: It's changed a lot. I mean, I call it the gentrification of food. I mean all this stuff that we used to eat, the red rice, the okra, now you go to some restaurants I won't name, and that's going to cost you upwards of $30 a plate to eat the food that I grew up on and that even now you can come to my house and eat and it won't cost me, you know, $0.95 for your plate. But yet you're supposed to go to a restaurant expecting to pay all that money. So, I don't like what's happened to our local cuisine that now it's become something exotic, you know, that you have to pay a lot of money for. It makes me furious to go out to some restaurant and see that they have quote "Southern food," but at the same time I'm very interested in the part that's changed to bring in a lot of innovative cuisine. Not local, not even remotely like local, but it's fun to get all this new big city food.

AG: Yeah, the new people like Sean Brock are kind of fusing different cultures and stuff together, which is kind of interesting.

BD: Well, he started out doing the--what do you call?--farm-to-table. And since, I mean, I had a career in food and hotels and hospitality and food and beverage and all that stuff. So, I follow the food and beverage scene really closely here. It's my second love after cultures is food. Who doesn't love food? And you know, if you go down to Husk now, which is a great world-renowned restaurant, you know, you're going to find--do you know Husk? Everybody knows Husk.

AG: Yeah, I've been fortunate enough to go there one time and it was great.

BD: Yeah, it's fantastic. But what'd you eat? Do you remember?

AG: It was like pork belly that had been sort of pressed together.

BD: You mean bacon with a lot of fat?

AG: Yeah, pretty much.

BD: I hate that word. Pork belly.

AG: But yeah, I remember it was, like, in a hockey puck shape. It was delicious. And I think he had the country ham. It was not like prosciutto, but it was sort of aged ham.

BD: I've had that in the bar there. It's really good.

AG: Yeah, it's good.

BD: It's fantastic. They usually, on a plate, they'll have greens, macaroni and cheese, corn bread, at least the last time I went. And I'm like, I came out for dinner. Why am I eating the same stuff I'm going to make at home? And it costs a lot more. So, the new cuisine is fun. Finding the same thing I have at home for $40, not so fun.

AG: Yeah, that's kind of crazy.

BD: Yeah, I think. But I'm sure the tourists love it, so I guess they got to have it.

AG: Okay, well that is actually all the questions I have, so--

BD: I probably talked way too much.

AG: No, you were great.

BD: I start telling the story and I forget the question.

AG: Right. Well, thank you for your time, Bambi, and we appreciate it.

BD: I am happy to do it.