

Oral History Collection

Alexis Johnson

Interviewer: Mykah Stanwood

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Place of Interview: Unknown

Mykah Stanwood: My name is Mykah Stanwood, and I'm interviewing my aunt, Alexis Johnson. It is April 25th, 2024, around 5:00 PM. OK, first question, Auntie, where were you born and where did you grow up?

Alexis Johnson: I was born in New Orleans, LA, and I was raised between the Magnolia Project and the Melpomene Project.

Mykah Stanwood: OK. So, when you think of New Orleans, what types of foods are you thinking of? Like? What types of foods do you think of and associate?

Alexis Johnson: Soul food. Soul food, seafood, Cajun food -- they say Cajun, but New Orleans is more home soul food. Cajun I think is more further out, like Slidell and Mandeville and Lake Charles and all them, we're really soul food lovers, yes.

Mykah Stanwood: So, like growing up, what types of food did you eat?

Alexis Johnson: Girl, we had -- Granny cooked turkey necks, smothered chicken, fried chicken, baked chicken, collard greens, mustard greens. But Granny really cooked mustard greens. She didn't cook collard

greens they -- she thought collard greens was too bitter.

Stanwood: I agree with her.

Johnson: And I, but I like them both now, but her majority was cooking collard -- I mean mustard greens. And she never cooked gumbo.

Stanwood: She never made them?

Johnson: But Auntie Anita was the gumbo queen. Like I am today. Yes, gumbo we did -- we did like simple meals, like daily meals. She would do some potatoes with sausage, smothered potatoes and sausage with onions. Delicious over rice. She would do corn and rice with sausage in it. Back then we used to eat pork chops. She would fry pork chops or eat the smothered pork chops. What else we had? What we never had, was chitlins. Yuck!

Stanwood: I know, that's right.

Johnson: Hello. No, we never had chitlins. That wasn't our deal. Another thing we never had that I hear a lot here in Texas -- chicken dumpling. We never had that. Yeah, they never had that. But Grandma was a famous red bean girl. She did -- she worked for

the famous restaurant Buster Holmes. So she did red beans, white beans, lima beans she did different beans. Sweet potatoes? Your dad keeps saying no one has never touched his mother's sweet potatoes.

Stanwood: He does say that.

Johnson: Yes, he, he said, "No, no, no, no." Potato salad was another one. She used to cook this meat called -- she used to call it seven steaks.

Stanwood: Seven steaks.

Johnson: Yeah, that was she called it seven steaks. And the baked macaronis that they have today.

Stanwood: Like the noodle macaroni?

Johnson: Yeah. Today they you they use the spaghettis.

Stanwood: Yeah.

Johnson: Back then, grandmother, your granny used a macaroni called spaghetti's number 7. It was a little fatter. And girl. Then when I met uncle, his mom did the spaghettis. The thin one like what was spaghettis. Hers was the bomb too. But yeah, that's the kind of food we had. We had cereal, we had

cereals, but when she did breakfast? No one did the grits like she did. Her grits, her homemade biscuits. She would have sausage. We would have bacon. Different, we would have lots of big breakfasts. If we we'll have lots of big breakfasts. Scrambled eggs or over easy eggs. However you want it, she did it. And Grandma had ten of us. Yes

Stanwood: A lot.

Johnson: Yes.

Stanwood: So when you were learning how to cook, did you, like, learn from Granny?

Johnson: Yes. So as a young girl, I always heard them say the best way to a man's heart is through his stomach, and I took that. I really took that and I strive with that. When I was a teenager, I wanted to, I told my mom, I said, "I wanna know how to cook for my husband." I have to know. So me and Auntie Sue was the girls in the kitchen. Out of all the sisters, me and Auntie Sue was in the kitchen with Granny. We would cut her seasoning up, have everything prepped for -- I learned from watching

Auntie Sue. Oh. And that's how I learned to cook.

One thing Auntie can't cook, can't fry? Chicken.

Stanwood: Uncle fries the chicken in the house.

Johnson: Yes, uncle fries the chicken. And you know what, Mykah? On Saturdays, Granny didn't cook. Hmm. Whatever you can eat, you can eat. Whatever you find to eat, that's what you're gonna eat. Granny didn't cook on Saturdays. Fridays, we would always have fish.

Stanwood: Was there any reason why she didn't cook on Saturdays?

Johnson: No, that was just her. I guess it was her -- not knowing what I know today. You know, because today is my Sabbath day. I believe, she didn't know, but she just didn't cook. Even uncle's Mom, they didn't cook back then on Saturdays. It was like a -- they needed a day to rest from cooking. They cooked six days a week and then --

Stanwood: It is a lot.

Johnson: Yes. And Sunday was a big day. Sunday, that's where all the food came in -- the ham, turkeys, fried

chicken, baked macaronis, peas, green beans with
bacon and potato. Oh girl, yes, yes.

Stanwood: So do you have like a specific memory that sticks
out to you growing up, like when it comes to food
and learning how to cook? Learning how to cook?

Johnson: Say it again.

Stanwood: Or like a memory with your sisters of like being in
--

Johnson: I don't have -- the only memories I have when it --
I'm the best cook out my sisters. Sorry, I said it
and I'll say it again. I don't, the only memories
I do have is me, Auntie Sue, and Granny. Because
Auntie Sue is like, five years older than me, I
think. Ah. Oops. 30 No, she's about four years
older than me, and she was still a young girl. No
boyfriend or nothing. So. She wanted to know, she
learned, and so I watched her. That was my fun
idea. Watching her so as I as she watched Granny
and she worked with Granny at the restaurant, I
began to watch them. Yeah, and he should work with
them.

Stanwood: The restaurant.

Johnson: Yeah, Granny worked in Buster Holmes.

Stanwood: What's that?

Johnson: It's old, it's a old, old soul food restaurant. If you go and Google it, it'll come up.

Stanwood: Is it still open today?

Johnson: No, they closed. They went out of business. About last year, Susan, Auntie Sue went and pulled up a video and Granny was on it. Yeah, working in the kitchen. Yes, she was a cook and a waiter. And Auntie Sue was waitress. Famous, famous people went there to get those red beans every Monday.

Stanwood: Red beans.

Johnson: Yes. And I think me, Auntie Kercheryl, and Auntie Denise -- I haven't tasted Auntie Lisa, but Lisa is a good cook also. But I believe me and Auntie Kercheryl have the beans pat down.

Stanwood: Yes, yes. So, like you mentioned you have so many sisters, you have a very large family. What was it like having to make food for all that family every day?

Johnson: Listen, Granny had the magnum lite pots. Them big, heavy big pots. A big magnum like pot will hold turkey necks. That whole pot would be full of turkey necks. And I had to learn, too. Coming into my family, I only have three sons, so raising up my boys, I had to learn. I used to cook so much because it was a habit of cooking a lot because of all, all of us. So I had to graduate to cooking small portions. And it was hard. Because I'm used to feeding all these people and we always have someone come over, we always had a friend somewhere that came over and had dinner with us.

Stanwood: That's nice.

Johnson: Yes.

Stanwood: We should start doing that more often, you know.

Johnson: Yes, we so scattered. Everyone is so scattered now.

Stanwood: Yes, yes.

Johnson: Yeah, yeah. I had Auntie Denise and Auntie Tracy here Sunday. And we had a great time. Yes, we don't eat like we used to and let me not forget about the ribs, the BBQ. Barbecue ribs, BBQ chicken or even BBQ pork chops. Yeah, we didn't even try our

BBQ turkey necks. Ohh, we done tried it all. Yes, I'm sitting here like I forgot about the ribs. Yes, we used to have the ribs.

Stanwood: And you talk a lot about how you used to cook so much, but I know nowadays Uncle usually does most of the cooking. So, like, how did that happen? How did that trade off start basically?

Johnson: Me telling him I cook too much. It's time for you. Uncle is a competitor when it comes to my cooking, ha! But now he learned to push back. Like, oh, no, he tell everybody. I try to make gumbo, but that's her. That's her baby. Yeah. She makes a baby. But I guess, so. When I was working on the other side of town. Me coming home from work tired, busted. And you know he's not working. He's retired. He do side works, but he's not working like I work. So he cooked more. And that's how that kicked in. And he, he could boil those crawfish and all that stuff. Potatoes and all that that's his real kick. Now, oxtails, we didn't start eating oxtails until we came here in Texas.

Stanwood: Hmm.

Johnson: And that man can cook some oxtails girl. This gravy was like, it was, but it's really the texture of the oxtails that really makes its own gravy. But he still knew how to season it. Ohh my goodness, yeah.

Stanwood: Uncle can cook.

Johnson: Uncle can cook -- and his meatloaf. I don't even try no more. I always try to do meatloaf, never could get it. He always done the meatloaf, always. He was a meatloaf man and he like hen. We used to eat hen -- thinking about the things we used to eat. We used to eat hen. He just cooked hen two Sundays ago.

Johnson: And I'm like, who gonna eat all that food?

Stanwood: Invite me over.

Johnson: So yeah, what he does, he takes some what he don't after we eat. He'll freeze the rest. So we put the date on it and put it in a freezer for maybe a week or two. Yeah, yeah.

Stanwood: Uh, Speaking of, like, different things that you eat, is there anything that you see in New Orleans

that like you don't really eat while you're here
and? Like vice versa.

Johnson: Po-boys --

Stanwood: Po-boys, po-boys.

Johnson: Po-boys, when I go to New Orleans, things I don't
eat anymore, I eat it when I go to New Orleans
cause; It's a po-boy. It's on the po-boy.

Johnson: I don't eat shrimps, but I would eat shrimps on a
po-boy.

Stanwood: MHM.

Johnson: I would eat oyster. Oyster po-boy, fish sandwich,
luncheon meat. They say it's the worst, but on the
po-boy you can't tell. It's just that po-boy, man.
So here I can't get po-boys. So every time I go to
New Orleans, there's a place that we stop at in
Kenner and we get a po boy sandwich. I tried the
hot sausage. I'll never try it again because it's
not the true hot sausage that we eat. We eat patten
hot sausage. They make their own, and it's a
difference. It's thicker, it's not as tasty as the
patten hot sausage is. But now, Texas gets a lot
of New Orleans things. Yeah, they have a lot of

New Orleans things because we're scattered. We're all over and --

Stanwood: Yeah.

Johnson: Now they have to realize that you know, I work with Walmart. Walmart had to realize HEB had New Orleans food before Walmart. Walmart said, "Wait, hold up, we losing our customers!" Yeah, buddy, you sure are. You better get that New Orleans, the Louisiana food. So Louisiana has its own section in Walmart. Yes, when it comes to the crawfish boil and all that gumbo mix, okra mix, beignets. They have all that in Walmart.

Stanwood: What was your favorite food growing up? Like if Granny made it, you would just ask for it. It's like your favorite thing. Like, can you please make me that that I love so much or something?

Johnson: What granny cooked? I loved Granny's meatballs and spaghetti. That was one of my favorites. But the Macaronis was the top. Nobody still today, nobody has made macaroni like my mom. She did the best. She would use eggs and milk and butter. Oh my goodness. And the spaghetti was -- they were, they were like, you know, like the penne? Penne

spaghetti is what they call them. They was fat like that, but they were long. They were number 7. And you -- I can't find them. My sister say they still sell them. No, they don't, girl. I can't find them. That was one. And another one? And you 'bout to prolly sound like "eugh". Liver.

Stanwood: Uh. Sorry.

Johnson: I knew you would. Liver and grits.

Stanwood: Liver, what does liver taste like?

Johnson: Liver is... I can't tell you. You have to taste it.

Stanwood: Maybe one day if you make it for me, I'll taste it.

Johnson: Yes. Now uncle makes them good, makes it good too.

I'm not a good liver cooker. Granny made her liver, when she did her liver, she smothered her liver in gravy. Uncle fries it, saute it with green onions and that's it.

Stanwood: Hmm.

Johnson: Yes, and he cooked over rice. Both of them. Granny did hers with grits. We do here, if we eat it, he do it with rice and it's really good.

Stanwood: You mentioned earlier that you are the gumbo queen.

How do you make gumbo like when you go to the store, what are you looking for? What? What are you doing?

Johnson: Honey. I am really the gumbo queen. Your dad turned his work buddies on to me and I make good money with them. Ohh yeah, I do gallons. I did my last one this year. Last year for the holidays. I always make it for the holidays. I make good money. Yeah, I'll say that. Yeah, so. The shrimps. Now we used to use, my aunt used the Blue Crabs. I uses the dungeon crabs and the King crabs. I look for the hot sausage. Because we use the patent hot sausage and it has to be the link so we can squeeze it and roll it in in a ball like a meatball. I use -- some people like chicken gizzards, some don't. But when I sell it I only do hot sausage. I do a smoked sausage to my taste. I just found the smoked sausage from a guy from Louisiana. He home makes smokes. And it's delicious. And when I tell you I bought a case for \$40. And I think it was probably maybe 25 long links in there. Yeah. So I look for smoked sausage. I get a Dewey sausage sometimes. Everybody don't like the Dewey sausage. If you

don't get the right one and they have too much fat in it. But dewey sausage for some reason, some of them have a lot of fat and it's not good. So you have to really know which one to buy. The crabs, the shrimps, crab meat, I put in it. What else Some people like chicken, some don't. Some people like turkey necks in it, some people don't. I might put chicken necks in it, depending on who I'm, who want it. Them country boys eat it all. Seasoning, I do, red onions, white onions, bell Peppers, shallots, the green onions. I use onion powder, garlic powder. Bay leaves is the number one. Bay leaves make your food pop. Yes.

Stanwood: That's what dad puts in his spaghetti.

Johnson: Yes, that bay leaf really make your food pop. What else I put in there? Celery. And when I cook it for home, it's the same thing. But they like the chicken and they want the potato salad. So here I use instead of rice, I do potato salad. So I put a scoop of potato salad and put a gumbo. Ohh yes. Ohh.

Stanwood: Dad had some leftover gumbo or whatever. It was frozen, and he also had some potato salad. And

like, I like heated up the gumbo. And I was like, what if I put it over the potato salad? It was delicious.

Johnson: Delicious, right? I turned my beautician on to it. And she was like, girl, I'll never eat gumbo with rice again. Yes, it has a good flavor. What I say? Bell pepper, shallots, green onions, red onions, white onions. I really love the onions. Bless you. Cause the white onions got, like a sweet taste. And it don't make it sweet, but it's not bitter. Celery and the Bay leaves. Salt and pepper, cayenne and I try not to use pepper. I'm not a black -- I don't like black pepper, so I use cognac pepper and I use dill. This is what all I put in my gumbo.

Stanwood: Do you have any dietary restrictions, like certain things that you won't eat or you will take out of certain recipes?

Johnson: I don't eat... So today everybody puts shrimps in everything. Shrimp and grits, shrimp and mac and cheese. Eugh. No, that's not for me. I will not put shrimps and I don't eat shrimps. What is it I don't put in something? I don't eat pork chops. I don't eat -- we try our best to stay. Away from

pork. Because of the sickness that it brings to people body. So, like when I do my beans back then Granny used to put pickled pig feet and pigtails in it. No, no, no, no, no. Only sausage. And if I put meat, it's going to be a smoked turkey. I'll boil the turkey, take the skin off it and just peel the meat and put the meat in the beans. Yeah. So, no pork in no beans.

Stanwood: Pork. Yeah, I didn't know red beans had pork in them until I was looking up ingredients and stuff. So, a lot of stuff has pork in it.

Johnson: Yeah. A lot of stuff has pork in it that we don't know of, even candy.

Stanwood: Yeah, because of the gelatin. Alexis Johnson: Yes, so that's why I'm really, I've changed my eating habits a lot. Yeah.

Stanwood: OK, so what advice would you give to someone, like me, who is learning how to cook?

Johnson: Don't use no measuring cups. I've never used -- now I'm lying. I'm lying. If I had a recipe from someone. But if it's something that I've been cooking, I'm not using no measuring cups. You know,

like they might say 1/2 a teaspoon of salt or half. Nah, I just season it to my taste. I just put it in there, put it in there. Make sure when you're cooking, when, if you using raw meat. So say you have chicken. And you're making a salad, not a potato salad or garden salad. Don't cross contaminate. Even if you cook your chicken already and you use your hands with that raw chicken. I use gloves. When it comes to me, I try my best to use gloves. Wipe down. Wipe, and vinegar is a good wipe down substance. People don't be like, like I don't use bleach no more, I use vinegar cause it whitens. Yeah, you just gotta be mindful. How you cook your food too. That is, you don't cook it fast. Because when you cook, that's what I used to do with chicken. So I just discouraged myself. So, I gave it up. I used to cook chicken fast, fry chicken fast and it would always be half done in the inside. So I told my husband you gotta do this chicken cause I ain't got it. I can't get it. And so he does it. He do the chicken in the garage. He fry the fish in the garage. It keeps your house from smelling.

Stanwood: Hmm.

Johnson: But as you cook, wipe down. Clean, clean as you go.
Keep yourself from getting sick.

Stanwood: OK. So when it comes to recipes and certain recipes,
what types of things do you think I should know
how to cook? Also, being from New Orleans, what
things should I always keep with me and know how
to make?

Johnson: Red beans.

Stanwood: Yeah, yeah.

Johnson: Red beans, that should be your number one go to.
That's the most, that's, they used to call red
beans, turkey necks, smothered chicken, poor man's
meal. They did. They called them poor man's meal.
Pork and beans and wieners. Yeah. Yeah. Poor man.
That's the -- corn and smoked sausage. Those are
poor man meals. Guess what else we used to eat?
Yellow grits. Poor man meal. I don't know where
she got them from, but we used to eat yellow grits.
Poor man's meal. Yes. So fried chicken. Baked
macaronis. Those, they're easy. Very easy. I don't
do recipes. I just tell you what I put in it. Now
talking about measure -- this a cup of milk here.
No, I ain't doing that. I'm gonna just tell you

what I -- what I cook. Yes, look, LaQuita is a good cook too. Yes, and Keisha. Now Keisha, Keisha have a index box.

Stanwood: Like of recipes?

Johnson: Mhmm. From all her aunts, she have a meal. She have something. She said she have the most from me. Oh, and I forgot the roast, cause talking about Keisha. That was her number one, the roast, the okra and shrimps and sausage. Yeah, all that. Keisha, if Keisha call you and ask you how to cook something, believe you me she got a pen and her index card and she writing it down and she putting your name on it. When you go to her house, she say, "Look, look what I have? Yeah." So just make, you can get you a index box and write down, call different one of us you know. And Auntie Sue is a good cook also. Now Auntie Denise, out of all the sisters, she makes the best dressing.

Stanwood: Dressing?

Johnson: Yes. She makes it from scratch. She don't use jiffy cornbread and all that. And I never asked her what she used, but I love -- she make me a pan every year. Yes. What else?

Stanwood: So, thinking of like seasonal foods like for holidays and whatnot, what's like your go to like, "I know I'm gonna make this for this holiday." I know I'm going to do this for this holiday. What? Like what are those?

Johnson: Turkey -- Thanksgiving. We know we're gonna do a turkey.

Stanwood: Right.

Johnson: But what else can we put with that turkey? So, he may do a fried turkey. He'll do a baked turkey and a fried turkey. Uncle is good with fried turkeys. He'd sell them during that season. So, we'll do a turkey, a baked Turkey. I'll bake the turkey. He fry the turkey. We do greens. We'll do sweet potatoes. We will do baked macaronis, make sure we have two sides, peas and string beans, cause I'm a string bean lover. I love green beans, I love the fat little short ones with onions. Make sure we have sweets. We buy that, you know. Only cake I ever baked and it's from the box, be honest, is the upside down pineapple cake cause its his favorite. He love the upside down pineapple and his mom used to bake it from scratch, and I never

got with her on, you know, what she did. So I just used the box, me. Quick. Yes, so certain holidays, you have certain things. So we don't eat ham, so we will never have ham. But for Christmas I might make gumbo for them. And I may make enough to last them for New Years, we'll do, but that's what I did every year. New Years I had the largest pot of gumbo because we had family over. I would have the biggest pot of gumbo that I can make. So it's certain years, so, also saying you know, I've come away from the holidays so. We may cook the beginning of the week and it just carry on, long as it don't have seasoning. Not like potato salad. Like keep it a day or two, trash it out and we want more. We'll make more. But like, if we do meat, we can freeze it, we'll pull it out the freezer and put it back in the oven. So certain things we don't cook in -- a lot of things we don't cook no more.

Stanwood: OK, so like you know, every once in a while when the family gets together, you and the aunties are all together and y'all are talking about who's gonna cook what, what? Who's gonna make this? What's like, what's everyone's -- what's their dish

that when y'all get together, they're gonna make this, you know? Someone's gonna make that.

Johnson: Auntie Tracy stuffed eggs! Girl Auntie Tracy made some potato salad and brought it here. Auntie Tracy, don't put relish in her potato salad. That's not potato salad, sorry. Her potato salad just look like potatoes mashed up with eggs and mayonnaise. Now. Then she puts some garlic in it. And I'm like, you put garlic in potato salad? Yeah. So, Auntie Kercheryl would bring the red beans. I'mma say Auntie Lisa is -- cause Auntie Lisa been in California for years. She will probably want us to do her gumbo cause we never had her gumbo. And they swear she's a great gumbo maker. So I would to ask her for her gumbo. If it's a holiday, like around Christmas, Thanksgiving, Auntie Denise's stuffing. Auntie Tracy, besides stuffed eggs, Auntie Tracy, good with the green beans and bacon. And she cuts her potatoes up so little and it be perfect. Auntie Sue. Ohh my goodness, Auntie Sue would probably want to bake the turkey. And let me back up, Auntie Denise, even though I don't eat ham, she will bring a ham, her and Uncle Steven. Auntie Netty? Oh, my goodness, it's been years since I've been around

Auntie Netty. I... Auntie Netty would probably
bring the paper plates and stuff.

Johnson: Yes, when we were young, she used to cook stove top
stuffing. I hate it. I hate it. So, I don't Auntie
Netty. I don't, I don't know what she cooks.

Johnson: Auntie Netty? Netty got married and left us, Auntie
Netty.

Stanwood: When I lived --

Johnson: Huh?

Stanwood: When I lived with her, I remember, she used to make
red beans and rice a lot of times.

Johnson: OK. So, see, you know red beans and rice.

Johnson: Who else? Ha! Your dad would try to make the
meatloaf. Sorry you ain't got it. And the meatballs
and spaghetti.

Stanwood: He loves making spaghetti.

Johnson: Huh?

Mykah Stanwood: He loves making spaghetti.

Johnson: He loves making Spaghetthis, girl. Think he da bomb.
Uncle Richard, I don't think cook. I think Uncle

Richard do more grilling. I think he could grill.
So he probably would grill and bring some ribs.

Stanwood: Mhm.

Johnson: Me, I can hear Auntie Darlene, "Please have your baked macaronis." So, I would do baked macaronis. Yeah, I would do baked macaronis and I also would do -- there's a dirty rice that Uncle's Mom made. And her dirty rice would consist of ground beef, hot sausage by patten and rice and shrimps. I would make that, your dad love it. Your dad say I'm the closest to anybody dirty rice he had besides Miss Olivia's. And I will make him some, I will make some sweet potatoes because he liked my sweet potatoes too. Yeah.

Stanwood: What else do I have?

Johnson: What else?

Stanwood: Hmm. About New Orleans, I know you touched a little bit on New Orleans food.

Johnson: OK.

Stanwood: But nowadays how much do you identify with New Orleans and New Orleans cooking? Like, do you think of yourself as a New Orleans chef, because I know

you don't ever really want to go back to live there, but how does New Orleans and New Orleans food play into your identity and your cooking?

Johnson: It plays a lot because I mean, that's why I learned how to cook.

Stanwood: MM.

Johnson: That's the food. That's what really taught me how to cook. You know red beans. What kind of seasoning to use. Cutting my seasoning up before you know, prepping all my stuff before I get it together. I mean, so I'm riding in Houston, right? And I see a sign saying po-boy. And I say, "Lies!" Because so many places I done went to, and they say po-boy and they're not po boy. So I go there and I'm like, Oh my goodness. And I asked them, could I see the bread? They be mad. Well, they don't let me see the bread, I leave.

Stanwood: Oh.

Johnson: Because po-boy is made on French bread, nothing else. Not a what -- what they call that bread? The the logies? Noogies? Whatever. Look, that's not,

that's not po-boy. Now, I did go to an Asian restaurant across from my job.

Stanwood: Oh. Did you have a banh mi?

Johnson: No.

Stanwood: They're good. I've heard that. I've heard good things about the banh mis.

Johnson: OK, I can't think the name of it, but it was a sandwich. A little short sandwich. Like a po boy. And that was the closest. My peer had ordered the sandwich and she said, "Try it." And girl when I bit down on that bread it was crunchy like the French bread. I said, "This French bread!" You know, so I can recognize. They'll put even seafood. Crawfish I've never seen, we never had, we had our crawfish is already boiled. Ain't no garlic. I don't know where they get all that from -- butter sauce. I don't know where all that stuff come from, but that stuff they made-up. But that's not the New Orleans style, even with the turkey necks. They may do turkey necks and have a salsa dip in it. Hmm, no? Yeah. But some of the people from New Orleans eat it because that's the closest they can get.

Stanwood: Yeah.

Johnson: Yeah. So they eat it, but I don't eat the crawfish and stuff.

Stanwood: Yeah. Have you said there's any parts of your cooking that you've like compromised? Like maybe since you've been out of New Orleans, like, OK, maybe some people do this a little bit better. Maybe this, maybe I like this way a little bit more.

Johnson: No.

Stanwood: I thought so.

Johnson: No. Here, most people love the Hispanic food and I like it too. I like the Hispanic food. I went to Boudreaux's. Boudreaux's. Even the Popeyes is not the same from New Orleans. Yeah. Does that make sense? Yeah. Churches. They're not the same. Popeyes, for sure, is not the same as it is in New Orleans. When you pop open a piece of breasts, you're gonna see that Cajun. You're gonna see that red, red season. You don't see that here. It has the taste, but it doesn't have all the seasoning like it has in New Orleans. Compromising with? No,

because one girl here and I'm real close to her, when she do her sweet potatoes, they dry. They don't do the -- granny did cut the sweet potatoes up, little bitty water. Because she say, "Baby, the sugar gonna mix this water." So little water, need your sugar, your nutmeg, your cinnamon. And with your butter, real butter, and at the end. Once it cook, you top it off with those marshmallows.

Stanwood: Marshmallows?

Johnson: What?

Stanwood: Ohh, sweet potato. I don't eat sweet potatoe.

Johnson: Yes! And I watched this girl cooking and it was dry.

"My granny said you don't need all that juice."

Girl, that's what makes the sweet potatoes. So now there's some soul food restaurants. I can say. Yeah. Mickey's, Mickey's is one. Mickey's soul food here in Texas, in in Houston. I think it's the number one soul food. There's another place called Oxtails, now. Her sister even have a, they both have restaurants, but Mickey's is the top. Yeah. Mickey's... Ohh girl and I forgot about the turkey wings. DidI say turkey wings, smothered turkey wings? Yes. Smothered turkey wings yes. Because

I'm looking at Mickey's counter with all her food. All the food. When you go in the restaurant. When I taste her wings, her turkey wings, I thought about mom. Yeah, she does them good. She does. And Granny used to love Salisbury steaks. Make her own Salisbury steak. Uncle make them too. And I never tried. Yeah. But. Some things to compromise with, no. I cook it the way I cooked it when I was in New Orleans. Yeah.

Stanwood: OK, I guess so growing up, you said you did a lot of cooking with Auntie Sue and Granny, but so like, what was it like? Like, how did you all get your ingredients, when you went to the store -- I know there was a lot of you. So were you buying in bulk? Was it like you get this, you get this you're in charge of this? Yeah. How did you afford all that cause?

Johnson: Granny had everything already. So Granny worked at the restaurant, so Granny made tips, good tips, real good tips. And Granny would do her grocery shopping, and she knew what she needed at all times. Like me, I might have to run out, like I don't use garlic, I had to go out and get me some

garlic today. To chew on something because I'm dealing with that vertigo and they're saying that to chew on some garlic, it'll help. And it's really helping me. The popping and stopping all. So, I have to -- I might forget something. "Ohh, babe, I need you to go get this!" I'll make a list. But Granny would have everything, right there. Granny would have all her -- so Auntie Sue would take everything out she needs. She'll tell her what she needs. I need my onions cut up, my celery cut up, my green onions cut up, bell -- and she would have it separate and clean, washed up and Sue just had to cut it up. And we didn't use a chopper. I use a chopper. I'm lazy. I use the chopper. Granny ain't use no chopper. Granny said you better use this knife and cut it up, and cut it up fine. Sue is the best cutter, when it came to seasoning. When it came to prepping for seasoning, call Auntie Sue. Yes, she didn't make it bulky. She cut it fine. Because some people don't like seasoning, so she would cut it so you wouldn't eat it, you wouldn't see it. But we didn't, we didn't have no lists. The only time Granny made the a list is for the holidays. This is, she'll tell us. This is my list.

This is what I'm gonna have. Granny did all the cooking. Granny didn't let, she didn't let us cook for holidays. That was her gift to us. She did, and we were talking about it Sunday, her last dinner. She called us. I want everybody over. Because after this, I ain't cooking no more. And she ain't cook no more. Then she had a stroke. Yeah. So she really didn't cook no more, but it was like she knew. But we all went over. I could see her sitting in her light, sitting in her light little duster, her sitting in the chair. "Now it's time for y'all to clean up, clean it up and get up outta here. Take it if you're taking in my bowls, you better bring it back. And if you take it, let me see what you're taking." And she never forgot what you took. She didn't write nothing down. Yeah, she had kept it in her head. I miss my mom.

Stanwood: I miss her too.

Johnson: Yeah.

Stanwood: So are there any things that like for you in the kitchen that you really inherited from her? Like, do you ever are you ever doing something you realize, like, my mom did this?

Johnson: Girl, when it come to folding my kitchen towels, all my towels really. But. Just keeping everything, wiping things down. You gotta have dish water ready made. You got, you have to have that was Granny, you have to have that dishwasher, that dishwater. Use a container like she used. She used white. I use black cause white get dirty fast so I have a container in my sink and I keep dishwater ready at all times. I can always wash my hands. I can always put my dish towel in there and wipe down the counter. Always have. Fresh water ready to wipe down. Butter? I keep butter. The real butter I keeps. She kept it faithful, I keep it faithful. I've gotten away from the sugar. I got away from the black pepper. She was a lover of black pepper. But she wound up having gallstones, and the doctor told us to stop giving her black pepper. And that's how I stopped using it. But some things, like certain seasonings, like SeasonAll, we found out wasn't good. So we switched over from that, but that was our go to right there. It was a seasoning called "All Season". Yes.

Stanwood: My dad.

Johnson: Your dad? Your dad have it?

Stanwood: I think so. I don't know.

Johnson: Its with a blue tap.

Stanwood: All season.

Johnson: Yes, all season. Yes, that was our go to. Having a
another thing having, bless you. Dish towels ready.
Always available. Like on the stove handle. Putting
them dish towels there so I can use them. Just
little things like that.

Stanwood: Well, OK. Is there any last things that you want to
talk about or maybe that were brought up that you
thought about that you want to talk about?

Johnson: Granny wasn't a baker.

Stanwood: Yeah, I didn't know.

Johnson: No. Yeah, none of us are bakers. The only thing
grandma made? So ,two things. Peach cobbler. And
bread pudding. Ohh my.

Johnson: Granny would save bread. She would go buy French
bread. They had a French bread bakery everybody
went to, they just opened back up out there in New
Orleans. She would buy this bread and let it sit

and get us to break that bread up, girl. Granny bread pudding. Ohh with raisins and that's all she put. She didn't put all that other pineapple and apple. She did nothing but raisins. She had the best bread pudding and her peach cobbler. But she wasn't a baker, baker like baked homemade cakes and all that. Her sister did that. Her sister, Auntie Nita, was more of a gumbo baking person because she wasn't a cook like Granny. Granny was a cook and I think Granny get that from her mom. Because her mother was a cook. Both of your great grandparents was good cooks.

Stanwood: Good to know. I'm sad I didn't catch that.

Johnson: Yeah. Yes. On our dad's side, his mom's banana pudding from, see all that boxed up thing? No, my granny did banana pudding straight from the straight from the -- homemade. I mean homemade. Then we was talking about it and her beans. Every Monday. You can go to her and she got red beans and banana pudding, every Monday. Never fail. Yeah. So we had some pretty good, we had. Back then the food was different than it is today. Yeah, the food is not the same like it was back then. Back then

it was clean cut and now they put all kind of things in, you know, spraying with things. And yeah, people just pushing away from it because it's causing a lot of sickness. Yeah, but back then shoot, they didn't have all this sickness and obesity that they did, like they have today. Today, they have a lot of people that's obese. You know, and not just, I'm not talking about heavy. Somebody like you could be really, your waist size may be 130, but you're wearing 180. That's obese. You know, so if we just push back a little bit, even using salt, a different salt, we use different things now. Now if I got people coming over and I know these people gonna eat, yeah, I'm gonna pull out me some red beans. Yeah, I'm gonna cook me some red beans, girl, some, and get some grilled, grill me some chicken. Let uncle pull the grill out. You know, when you have a bulk of people, you know what to have. But, in your household -- now is different. It's not the same. Yeah, I'm more now, I'm on fruits. Yeah, I'm on fruits.

[End of interview]