
FULL TRANSCRIPT:

SUBJECT: O'Neil Broyard, owner & bartender
Saturn Bar
3067 St. Claude
New Orleans, LA 70117

DATE: March 30, 2005 @ 1:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Saturn Bar

INTERVIEWER: Amy Evans

LENGTH: Approx. 36 minutes

NOTE: Various sounds occur throughout this interview. Rather than mention them individually and interrupt the flow of the conversation, they are noted here: city buses can be heard passing by regularly, O'Neil constantly pats the bar with his hand for emphasis while talking, and the two dogs in the bar bark from time to time. When the occurring sounds are an obvious interruption to the interview, they are noted in the transcript.

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[Recording opens with sound of microphone being moved]

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance, and it's Wednesday, March thirtieth. And I'm at the Saturn Bar with owner [O']Neil Broyard. Um, [O']Neil, if you don't mind, saying your name for the record.

O'Neil Broyard: O'Neil Broyard

AE: And, um, [sound of microphone being turned around] your birthdate, too, if you wouldn't mind. So we can get you—

OB: Twelve twenty-seven, thirty-seven. [December, 27, 1937]

AE: Okay. And—

OB: You want to know my social security number too and all that stuff?

AE: [Laughs] No, that's all right. Thanks. [Laughs]

OB: [Laughs]

AE: Um, so how long have you been the proprietor here at the Saturn?

OB: Since nineteen sixty.

AE: Yeah? And I understand that it was, um, another bar—

OB: Oh, yeah.

AE: —before it was called the Saturn, is that right?

OB: Originally, it used to be a gro—it was Campo's Grocery Store. And Buster Morant opened it up in 1947. And they named it, uh, Buster's Bar. He stood here until 1958. And a few guys had it off and on: Ruth's Bar and, uh, Bob's Bar. Bob took it over right after he worked for, uh, Thrift Store Novelties. His brother worked for Thrift Store Nov—Thrift Store Novelties put, you know—put the music box and the pinball machines in here in those days. And Bob ran the bar almost about a year, then he gave it up. And this guy Frankie Bean took it over, named it Ruth's Bar. He came off of Tulane Avenue. [Clears throat] Then after that, this guy, Noel Caruso, took it over. [Sniffs] And I got it from Noel Caruso in 1960.

AE: Yeah? What made you want to get into the bar business?

OB: By accident. I said I'm gonna try it out for six months, and I got stuck here. I'm still here.

AE: [Laughs] Had you tended bar or worked in the service industry anywhere else before that?

OB: Yeah. When I was coming up I worked bar at—different pl—places. When I was thirteen years old I used to work at Cousin's Restaurant and Bar on Bartholomew and Rampart [streets]. [Short pause] And I worked there in the bar room. You know, broiled crab, crawfish, shrimp and all that stuff like that. Delivery. In those days, it was six beers for ninety-nine cents.

AE: Wow.

OB: And you're lucky if you had a penny tip when you made a delivery. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs] And you were thirteen when you were doing that?

OB: Yeah. Well, in them days you could, you know—

AE: It didn't matter.

OB: It was a restaurant, you know, just delivered sandwiches, soft drinks. And then once in a while we delivered beer in those days, but they didn't—they wasn't too strict on—on underage people. Uh, then later I worked in different bars all over. Back there, back there, [pointing to his

right and then his left] Coconut Grove. And then I got to this place here. Well, I worked here, too, before I took it over.

AE: Yeah?

OB: Yeah. [Short pause] Like the same guy had—Noel, you know—I used to work at that corner bar [inside The Saturn]. Help him out, you know, [at] different times.

AE: So what do you like about being in the bar business [and] tending bar?

OB: It's not the idea of liking it. The—I just formed a habit of being here.

AE: Yeah? [Laughs]

OB: It's not the likes and dislikes, believe me. Sometime you get some nice—very nice people, sometimes you get a few [sound of bus passing outside] oddballs. Which [they] don't know how act. Like I had two guys come in one night, one guy kept going in the back. He was smoking weed. So I went back there after he came out the dressing room back there, [and] you could smell the weed. And you know, you get the crackheads and all that stuff. You get the people [who] come in here with their little half-pints of booze. They'll go sit over there, you know, buy a Coke or something, you know. And then when they leave, you go over there to clean up, and you look behind there and there's a half-pint of, uh—well, sometimes they got the r—the rum—Bacardi rum, Takka vodka, Jack Daniel's. One time upstairs there, they had a—they came with a whole gallon of orange juice. They just walk in, you know. Chooo, right upstairs. And they left all the bottles up there. Big bottle of Twenty-Twenty wine. [Short pause] Uh, it wasn't half-gallons. It was about a—a quart—no, about a fifth of Jack Daniel's. The square bottle, black label. Uh, yeah, a pint—pint of g—uh, vodka. And, uh, Early T—not Early Times, uh, bourbon, uh, Kent—no, uh, what the hell was it? [Turns head towards back of bar] I got a look around here. Wild Turkey. [Laughs] Wild Turkey. They were having a ball up there.

AE: [Laughs]

OB: On me! And they still do that.

AE: So what—you, you know, came up working in the [French] Quarter and stuff, and then you got this place out here. We're in the Bywater, right? Are we?

OB: Yeah, Bywater.

AE: So what's the difference in being out here in this neighborhood?

OB: No difference. Why?

AE: I don't know. Just wondering. Fewer tourists, more locals, different scene—

OB: Well, I guess everything changes. Thirt—forty-five years ago and now. You understand? Which—anyway, everything's all right. It's a little slow right now. People—I think we are in a depression right now. But it wasn't said in—in the newspaper, it wasn't said on television, but money's so tight. We—what costs us, money being tight. Get—get—we're all going up. You think back—way back when—what was it? [Whispers] The Depression. So—well, you got to live with it. You know, you got taste the bitters as well before you enjoy the sweets.

[COUNTER: 05:10]

AE: [Short laugh]

OB: Some people—and today, everybody enjoys sweets. Shit. You think back, say, sixty years—not sixty years. Well, yeah, you could say sixty years, people didn't even own a television, they didn't own an air-conditioning unit, they—no microwave, you know?

AE: Yeah.

OB: But they got by. Today these girls coming up today, they even hate to try to put something in the microwave. They don't want to cook. They want to go out and eat. They don't know what washing clothes are. Have to wring 'em out and all that stuff like that, you know. [Laughs] Go hand 'em out in the backyard? They got washeterias and dryers. They got it made.

AE: So how has the—

OB: They don't know what hard times are.

AE: How has the bar business changed since then? Besides just like prices of things.

OB: People in general. Their attitude. People today—[short pause] Not all of them, now. Don't get me wrong. I'm not speaking in general, everyone. But some that walk around, they just don't know how to say, "Hi. Hello." Smile? They look like they're walking around with a chip on their shoulder. You know? And—I don't know. [Sound of O'Neil adjusting his watch] People are not nice. You know, you could walk down the street, you know, you got gesture like that [nods head up] and they might turn the other way, you know, never try to [say] "Hi. Hello" and all that stuff. They just don't have it anymore. "Pardon me. Pardon me." [Short pause] They don't have it. Really! Some do. Not all of them.

AE: Do you get many tourists over this way?

OB: Oh, yeah, yeah. I get a lot of tourists from all over.

AE: Yeah? How do they hear about you?

OB: Well, it's on the Internet. [Sound of bus passing by] You know, travel guides and stuff like that. Word of mouth. [Sniffs] New York—had some people in from New York the other day. Atlanta, Chicago, Frisco, uh, [short pause] w—no. I think it was Wisconsin. Colorado. All over the continent. Well, you know, you ask everybody, you can tell a tourist when they come in that they—they're not regulars. [Laughs]

AE: [Laughs] Yeah. You have a lot of regulars?

OB: No, not as many as I used to. They—it—well, you've got to look at it this way. I don't open up until four o'clock in the evening. Now years ago, I used to open at nine—nine o'clock in the morning. We still got—the old-timers still living in the neighborhood before used to come wait for you to open up in the morning. They come over there, they'd sit down and play a little Knock Rummy [card game] or something all day long, you know, to pass the time away. They all died or moved off, when everybody moved out of the neighborhood. So you don't have too many regulars.

AE: What did those regulars like to drink?

OB: Mostly beer. Ah, you get to the college kids and all that come in and want—they get a beer with a straight shot or something. "I want Jagermeister," or something like that, which I don't handle anymore. Because they get too stupid on that stuff. You know, they want to throw their glasses up against the wall and all that stuff, you know. [Clears throat] And I just don't put up with it. I just don't. If they say, "Jagermeister," I say, "I don't have any." [They'll say,] "Well, what you got? Can you make a B-51?" I say I don't make none of that stuff. They want the layers, you know?

AE: Yeah, for shots?

OB: Oh, what the hell. Like the—I can't even think of half the stuff I have over there to make it but, uh, I quit handling it. Irish—Irish cream—what the—Bailey's Irish Cream, you know? They used to order three layers, you know, in this shot.

AE: Do you mix many cocktails?

OB: Oh, yeah, a few. Yeah. The regular ones. You know, I make like a Bloody Mary or a Whiskey Sour, uh, Tequila Sunrise or vodka orange juice, you know. Uh, [if they] want cranberry juice, grapefruit juice, you know. Little Martinis once in a while. Manhattans, you know. Something plain and simple

like that. All them shake drinks and all that stuff like that. Phew. I used to make the—like a, uh, Black Russian, you know, with the milk, the vodka, and the Kahlua. I tell them you got to go uptown if you want a fancy drink.

AE: Yeah? [Laughs]

OB: [Laughs]

AE: How do you think times have changed? Maybe you did some more of that a couple decades ago? Did some more cocktails or, no?

OB: Ah, well you get different people, baby. You know, people come in and ask you—want a, uh, uh, what the hell are those—about four drinks—what—what do you call—a sting—not a stinger. A Long Island Iced Tea. You know, you got to put your white rum, white gin, and vodka and all that stuff in it, you know. I make that once in a while. Got to have a tall glass and all that shit, you know. But, uh, I—I like everything plain and simple. You know, come in—like I mean, like—“What kind of beers do you have here?” Just like asking me, “What kind of cigarettes do you have?” I said, “What kind do you smoke?” And see, he was going to tell me that—that one brand. And me naming all fifteen, twenty brands, you know?

AE: Right.

OB: Same thing with the beer. I got thirty-five, forty beers. You want to kind what kind of beers we have? I say, “What kind do you normally drink? You just starting to drink or what?”

AE: [Laughing]

OB: [Laughing] You know? You had to drink something somewhere.

[Sound of cooler refrigeration cutting on]

AE: What do you think about those fancy drinks that they serve down in the Quarter?

[COUNTER: 10:03]

OB: It's a gimmick to get—that's a—that's a drawing card, that's all. You—like the—the Hand Grenade, you know? Now they got four different places—it's all one clique, you know? [Sniffs]

AE: Well, people come to New Orleans to drink.

OB: Oh, I hear they're partiers. They stay open all night, but I'll close it down. But I don't like to stay open all night.

AE: Do you know about the—the history of cocktails in New Orleans and like Southern Comfort being a drin—a—a liquor that was—that came from here and—that kind of history?

OB: Southern Comfort? I don't know that it came from here. I wouldn't know, to be honest with you. The only—only—the only thing I know of that came [from] here, like a, uh—[short pause] oh, that new rum they got out, New Orleans rum. I forget the name of it. The guys who make it here. God, they used to have—Absinthe, I believe, was from here, but they quit making that because it had opium in it. Uh, like the Sazerac come from the, uh, [coughs] I can't even think of the bar's name right now. Uh, uptown there. I don't know, shit.

AE: [Laughs]

OB: They make them fancy drinks with the—like you go to Pat O'Brien's, you get the Hurricane. Come to Saturn Bar, you get what you like. [Laughs]

AE: So how would you describe your bar here?

OB: Well, you wouldn't—well, years ago you'd call it a neighborhood bar. It's a regular—a regular bar room. You know, it's not—not—not—well, the only difference from all the other bars is all the murals on the wall, you know. That's the only attraction I have.

AE: When did those murals get done?

OB: Nineteen sixty. That's before art was art. Nobody knew what art was in the—in the sixties. Now you go all over uptown and all that, everything [is] art, art, art, art, art, art. You know? Everybody's an artist today.

AE: And a local artist did these?

OB: Oh, they got plenty of local artists. I don't know them all by name. They got Doctor Bob over there on—on Chartres Street. He does a—a few little things, you know. "Be nice or leave," You know, that's his logo. His claim to fame—fame.

AE: Well, when you first got here, did the place, you know, have all this character and all these—this whole collection?

OB: Nah.

AE: It's been added on to over the years?

OB: The ceiling—all painted. Well, the first thing I did, I paint—we painted the ceiling, me and Mike Frolich. Mike Frolich did all the murals and all. Him and I took the roller over—blew up there, we marked it off everything and

put the—put the Earth, the sun, Saturn up there and that stuff like that. That's what we did in the beginning. Then he started painting these murals.

AE: What about all your collections of stuff? Your [baseball] caps and paintings and different knick-knacks?

OB: I buy a few things at garage sales. I used to. I don't go to garage sales anymore. Because I ain't got no place to put half the shit.

AE: [Laughs] Do people give you a bunch of stuff?

OB: [Laughs] People don't give you stuff.

AE: [Laughs]

OB: That's what everybody says, "People donate these paintings? People do this? Do this? People did that?" Look at all the paintings. Got Mike Frolich's name on all the—just about all of them. [Sniffs] A few of them I bought from, you know, at garage sales. You know, like the one over there. The little picture over there, I bought at a garage sale, you know.

[Short pause]

AE: I read in the *Obituary Cocktail* book—I think that's what it was.

OB: Yeah.

AE: About the, um, boxing matches that would go on back in the back.

OB: Oh, yeah. We had a boxing ring back in—in, uh, sixty, sixty-one. Maybe sixty-two, and then we got rid of it. About—about a year-and-a-half, two years we had a—they got out of hand, though, you know.

AE: Oh, yeah?

OB: Yeah.

AE: People betting and—

OB: No, it wasn't like this. We—we—anyway, somebody would get in an argument, put the gloves on, and get in the ring back there, you know. That's all that was.

[Short pause]

AE: So are you a drinking man?

OB: [Shakes head "No."]

AE: No?

OB: I'm not drinking. Ah, I drink a couple of beers at night when I drink. I don't start drinking [until] about eight, nine, ten o'clock. Bad heart. I drink three, maybe four beers. But I don't drink. I ain't drank in the last two months. I'm in a doctor's care right now. Got a salt diet and all that stuff. All that good stuff. [Moves pet cat off of bar]

AE: Do you have any good stories about some regulars coming in or some things that happened back in the day with you being in the bar?

OB: Nah. [Starts digging through a drawer in front of him and under the bar.]

AE: Nothing?

OB: I thought I had a—I thought I had a picture in here for you to—quicke—a quickie.

AE: [Laughs]

[Short pause]

OB: Should be right here somewhere. There—there it is right—[Sound of O'Neil wiping dust off of the face of a photograph] Fast look and that's it. These guys are naked. [Holds up an eight by ten inch black and white photograph of two men boxing—naked but wearing shoes and socks. Their faces are cropped out of the picture.]

AE: Okay. [Laughs]

OB: So don't stare. That's when we had the boxing ring.

AE: Oh, my goodness. [Laughing]

OB: That's the boxing ring.

AE: Oh, my goodness. That's a piece of history right there.

OB: [Laughing]

AE: Wow.

[Sound of drawer closing]

OB: Way back when.

AE: Yeah. [Laughs] Oh, my gosh. Did you take that picture?

OB: How could I?

AE: I don't know.

OB: I'm one of the guys in the ring.

AE: Oh, okay! Well, then.

OB: [Laughing]

AE: [Laughing]

OB: Yeah.

AE: So you jumped from behind the bar into the ring, huh?

OB: Oh, yeah.

[COUNTER: 15:16]

[Sound of front door opening and slamming closed, with bell ringing as man enters the bar.]

AE: [To man] Hey.

MAN: [Speaks in a mumbling voice, like he has marbles in his mouth] Hey, how's it going? O'Neil!

OB: That's a local that lives down the block.

MAN: Look at this big flowerpot I found.

OB: I see it.

MAN: You see it? [Man approaches the bar holding what is actually a tiny clay flower pot about two inches tall.]

AE: All right.

OB: Oh, God!

MAN: Yeah? You think we can blow him up or what?

OB: We—yeah, you got to put some weed in there, babe.

MAN: [Places clay pot on bar in front of O'Neil] Put something in there, whatever.

OB: Yeah, okay. [Sound of O'Neil picking up foil pan to place the pot in.] I'll put some little seeds in there with some mulch to start 'em off.

AE: Yeah, what about your little garden you have back there? What is all that?

OB: That's my little—I got, uh, I stuff and I just started fooling around, you know. Like I eat an orange or something, put a couple seeds back there, ku—uh, kumquats, lemons, maybe a navel orange, Satsumas, all that shit like that, you know. And I let it start to come up.

MAN: And eggplants. You didn't talk about the eggplants.

OB: I don't like that—every time I grow a eggplant—that—they don't grow. I have bad luck with them. They don't grow big, they [are] small. It's cheaper to go buy one, man. Shit. You know? 'Cause it takes up all that room. You got to plant 'em and all that. I have 'em in the backyard, inside, in here. The only thing I had good luck with all my life was goddamn cucumbers and bell peppers. And one year I had—

AE: Cucumbers can grow.

OB: Yeah.

AE: That's no lie.

OB: And one year back there I had fifty-one tomato plants. I used to pick the tomatoes in the morning, and put 'em in a beer box to share like that [points to a cardboard box] Put 'em in a box, let people take 'em. But you'd be surprised. Instead of just grabbing a couple, they got to pick up each one and look at it [pretends to be holding a tomatoes up for close inspection]. [Laughs] Especially the melatons [squash plants]—the melatons, I used to pick them and put them up there and let them take what they want. That's all melaton plants I got back there. And I go plant 'em over there. I'm gonna go plant some on the side there. I got a—I got a lemon tree outside. I got a grapefruit tree outside. I got a peach tree. Japanese plum tree. And, uh, Satsuma tree, yeah.

AE: Do you use some of that to garnish your fancy cocktails you make around here? [Laughs]

OB: No. You don't get that many, you know. [Short pause] This is Mister Simon Brown. [Introduces man who walked in with the flower pot to interviewer. He had been standing near the bar for the last few minutes.]

AE: Hello, sir. Amy Evans.

SIMON: Pardon me?

AE: Amy Evans.

SIMON: Nice to meet you.

AE: Nice to meet you.

OB: She wants to know something about the neighborhood and the bar, if you want to have a few words. She's taking down a little tape [recording] right here. Got me talking in here.

AE: Getting some history.

SIMON: I got—I got a surprise for you. Somebody's gonna ask him to borrow more than four hundred dollars.

OB: Yeah? They got—they're in trouble.

SIMON: [Laughs]

OB: They're in serious trouble. Tell them to go get their money where they spend their money.

SIMON: I fell of a chair [and] hurt my back again. Fell off a chair. They're going to go ask for four hundred dollars. I fell of a chair.

OB: [Laughs]

SIMON: Mmm, mm, yeah. Yeah. I don't borrow nothing for 'em, but she wanted me to ask.

OB: Yeah, if it's "she," she's in trouble.

SIMON: Yeah.

OB: She's got some nerve, huh?

SIMON: I kicked her—I booted and she ran. Aye-yi-yi. Last I put a surprise, eh.

OB: Well, she comes in here [laughs]—

SIMON: I'll go home.

OB: She come in the other night, she says, "Come here, I wanna talk to ya." I says, "You wanna borrow the money, save the walk over there because I'm not gonna lend you anything."

SIMON: [Laughs]

OB: That's it, remember? I came in and told you she was looking for you.

SIMON: [Laughs]

OB: Nooo!

SIMON: Yeah.

OB: She ain't spent a penny in here yet. She come in with a—a bottle of water in her hand she bought someplace else.

SIMON: Yeah, se got it from my house.

OB: Oh.

AE: [Laughs]

SIMON: Oh, boy.

OB: Well, you pick 'em. You got to get rid of them girls.

SIMON: I got a winner too.

OB: Get—get somebody that's working. At least she's got some money in her purse.

SIMON: Yeah.

AE: [Laughs] [To O'Neil] You have some regulars that keep tabs around here? You let that happen?

OB: Oh, no tabs! No! Well, I lend him [Simon] money you know. But—and then he goes overboard and—

SIMON: Guys, I can't—I just took a pain pill.

OB: Oh, my God. Go lay down.

SIMON: I'm might pass out. [Said as he's walking away towards the front door to leave.]

AE: [To Simon] Nice to meet you.

SIMON: [Addresses one of O'Neil's dogs as he's walking towards the front door] Get out of he way, poochy-pooch.

AE: Do you have some music here, ever? [Sound of front door opening]

OB: Oh, yeah. I used to have bands here. I used to have the—every time—they was from Richmond, Virginia—[sound of door slamming shut and bell ringing] every time the Useless Playboys used to come in town for a gig or something [slaps palm of hand on bar] they used to stop here and play a gig one night.

AE: Where do they set up?

OB: Upstairs.

AE: And I know you're known for your jukebox.

OB: Yeah, I got three of them right there. Two of them's busted right now. I got—I got two more, but I'm waiting on a capa—capacitor for the one over there. I got to call that guy up to see what he—and the fuse is burnt out in this one right here. [Car horns in background] It—it's hard to find them old—them old fuses and that. What we have to do—I'm gonna have to get the same amount of amperage and take that little slot out and rewire it with new wires and put that—that fuse in, you know, get it to work.

AE: Did you stock all the music in there yourself?

OB: Um-hmm. [Short pause] Oh, I've got another music box [that] I left with this guy with some real, real old records on it. I was thinking this morning about going over there and getting it.

AE: Yeah? Do you have some favorites?

[COUNTER: 19:56]

B: Oh, yeah. I got—way back in—in the [nineteen] fifties, when they all first started coming out. "Lawdy, Miss Claudy," you know and, uh, "Sixty Minute Man" and—you know, Timmy Ural [?] and Eartha Kitt and [short laugh] uh, Laverne Baker and all that—real oldies, you know. You know, Fats Domino, Lloyd Price, all of them. Johnny Adams. "High School Dance." [Starts to sing] *Just one more dance with you before the night is through. We'll dance and dream like all the lovers do at out high school dance. Bomp-bomp.* [Slaps hand on bar twice] [Sighs].

AE: Was there much live music, um, in the days before you owned the bar? Did some groups come through or singers or anything?

OB: Well, right when I got it in the [nineteen] sixties, the—the—the, uh, the change in music came out in the—in the, uh, the early fifties. [One of O'Neil's dogs barks and continues barking for a minute or so] Shit, like Patsy Cline, you know, "Walking After Midnight." She was out, you know, in the late, uh—late fifties. [Two dogs barking now] Uh, what's the—Buck Owens was popular then. Donald Gibson was popular. Theresa Brewer was popular then. Uh, Joan Stafford. You don't see to many like her. Like the other night I think they played—they play the oldies like Joni James' "Doggie in the Window." "This Old House," with, uh, I can't even think of the people's names anymore. Jesus to Joseph, what's her name? [Short pause. Dogs still barking] I see her but I—Rosemary Clooney.

AE: Oh, yeah

OB: Rose—"This Old House." About—yeah. [Sighs]

AE: So what are your mascot's names? Your dogs here?

OB: Uh, let's see. The one over here, this is Sassy here. That's Prissy over there. She's just learning how to start barking, her.

AE: Oh, yeah? She's a pup?

OB: She's—no, uh, they both—both about the same age.

AE: Oh, okay.

OB: A couple months apart. [Barking stops]

AE: Yeah. Do they ever get behind the bar to help you out? [Laughs]

OB: [Short laugh] No. [Laughs] When they're looking for something to eat or want to go outside, they come back here and start barking. When they come back here and both of them start barking, they either want something to eat or go outside and get a—a little piss walk, you know, and—

AE: Yeah.

OB: —I'll bring them back in.

AE: So what did this place look like before you go a hold of it?

OB: Well, a regular bar. The bar wasn't like it is right there. It was—it was this way, going this way, you see. And they used to have two pinball machines right there. They had a music box right by this post right there. And the bar went straight [draws out the word] to the back, and there were three pool tables back there. They didn't have no booths and stuff like that over there. Just empty. And that side door used to open up, and they came

through the side door and the front door. [Sniffs and sighs] And the old pool tables were, you know, were a nickel a cue with the drop pockets, you know. No coin-operated. Then later on, we'll I bought me two coin-operated I went uptown on Airline Highway [and] I bought one. In those days, you couldn't buy anything. You couldn't be an independent own—owner. A lot of people had, uh, uh, amusement equipment was by a licensed businessman, you know. Like Harry Fresch [who used to be] down there at Poland and Saint Claude [Streets], I bought my first music box from him. He sold it to me for a hundred dollars—a little Rock-Ola. Then I sold that one for, uh, two fifty, [to] some guy in the place here. Then I bought another music box for five hundred. You know, a Seaberg. And that's how I—I got started owning my own stuff. Them days you couldn't—wadn't supposed to have anything—you had to have a license. Oh, Lord. [Clears throat] Well that's when we were coming up—now, you know. I had cigarette machines, you know, and shuffleboard machines. You could put ten cents in a bowling machine with balls. A big long one. I used to have it against that wall right there [points across the room to where the booths are]. And I used to put pool tables—I'd buy a pool table—buy a pool table for [short pause] No, I would—I would have my pool table—put a pool table and at another bar room, I would buy my barstools. Barstools were like twenty-seven dollars apiece. Go buy them six barstools [and they'd] let me put the pool table in there. Then I could that ten, fifteen dollars a week. In them days, you know, ten, fifteen dollars was ten, fifteen dollars, you know?

AE: Oh, yeah.

OB: And I had the bumper pool tables. I had one back there about [short pause] well, this guy's place over there, but he—he thought I was supposed to supply him with quarters every goddamn week. He—I have him four hundred dollars of quarters in the machine. "I need some quarters!" he'd say. I'd go over there and open it up and give him some quarters, you know. I just thought—ten people over here, a half-gallon, you know, whiskey or something, you know. And it just got out of—I just went over there one day, an I took my machine out of there. You know. [Short laugh] It was more aggravation than it was worth.

AE: Yeah?

OB: Oh. [Burps]

AE: So what do you think makes a good bartender?

[COUNTER: 25:02]

OB: Well, you have personality, control. You can't be hot tempered. That's a—that's a no-no. Because today—especially today. Especially the drunks. You got the—you got to have control. You can't let them tell you what to do. You know what I mean? And to tell you—"Take a walk. Go ahead. That's it.

Get out." Like I usually tell them, "You got two ways to get out: by yourself or with some help."

AE: Yeah? [Short laugh]

OB: You can't do that shit anymore, though.

AE: So it's mostly about personality, then you think?

OB: Oh, yeah.

AE: Not really how you—how you make a drink?

OB: Like I said earlier, now when I first talked about people, they look—they walk with chips on their shoulders? They don't know how to be polite and say hello, hi and all this stuff like that? They'll come in. Like last night a guy—they'll sit there and looking at one another, then you stand there waiting for their order [short pause] they don't tell you, and you walk away. "Hey!" [Pounds bar imitating impatient customer] And all that shit like that. And then they want a drink. When they're ready.

AE: Yeah. You don't stand for that, huh?

OB: [Coughs] You know what I want to tell them—but I got to, "Can I help you?" [Spoken with a sarcastic tone] You know.

AE: Have you ever had anybody working back there with you, or has it just been you all the time?

OB: Oh, yeah. Years ago. But I'm right here [at the bar], and then she's giving the guy a double shot of Jack Daniel's, and she don't collect for it. I said, "What are you doing, running a tab?" [She would falter and say,] "Uh—." I said, "You didn't collect for that drink. And I saw him pick the drink up, turn around and walk off." [Short pause] [She said,] "Oh, he did me a favor. I—I—I'll get that later." Well, later—later I said, "Well, things are slow. Don't need you no more." You got help, they give you shit. It's tough work today. They all steal. That's why I ain't got nobody. Open up at four [o'clock in the afternoon] stay open until about twelve [at night]. If I got customers, I'll stay open a little later. If not, I'll lock it up. I save about twelve hundred [dollars] a month on salary. Just on one person. 'Cause they don't work for nothing. I used to pay them forty dollars a shift.

[Short pause]

AE: Plus [the] tips they'd make?

OB: Yeah. Oh! They did pretty good, babe!

AE: Yeah, I bet.

O: They're cashing in a bunch of twenty dollar bills at the end of the shift, you know. And the got—it's stuffed in there [in the tip jar]. [They'd] write up like forty-two, fifty-three dollars or something like that, instead of over a hundred dollars the should be ringing up. But they're giving your stuff away, so they're making them tips. But—I don't have to be—you know, in other words, I don't have to put up with all that. Worry about if you go—go someplace or what's happening over there. "Hey, man!" Like a bartender I went by his house, he says, "Hey, man, we need some Pepsis and we need some Cokes and we need some Chocolate Soldiers." And I said, "Man, I just bought some Monday. We're out already?" I bought two cases of chocolate soldiers. I go by his house, he's coming out of his trailer, drinking a Yahoo [Yoo-hoo chocolate soda].

AE: [Laughs] What'd you call them? Chocolate Soldiers?

OB: Yeah, it's a chocolate drink.

AE: Oh, okay.

OB: They call them Yahoo [Yoo-hoo], you know.

AE: Yeah, yeah.

OB: Well, years ago they used to call them Chocolate Soldiers [the brand], you know. Now the call them Yahoo [Yoo-hoo].

AE: Yeah. He had 'em, huh.

OB: So anyway, he got my case. And his daughter drank Pepsi Cola, [and I] saw case of that. The other ones, you know, I was here one morning, I went in the back—came trough the back—I came through the back, and I was watching him. He got here early in the morning about nine o'clock, and he used to, you know, clean up and all that stuff. And I watched him. The daughter came in behind the bar, used the telephone, stopped here, got a pack of cigarettes, stopped there, got herself a Coke, went there—and I said damn! She said, "Dad, I need some money." He went back there, hit the register, took a couple dollars, gave it to her, she walked out the door. And that's before went up [to open] that morning. And I got to pay him to do this.

AE: Yeah. [Laughs]

OB: I was lucky, though, it was just one daughter! Then the wife comes with all the kids—potato chips, candy, soft drinks, cigar—Oh, God! [Laughs] So one day I just—I emptied the pool tables back there, put all the quarters in a cigar box. [Short pause] And—well, I never did count my stuff. Didn't have to

bag it up or anything. You know I'd just grab some quarters whenever I'd want to. So I needed some quarters [pounds fist on bar], and I reached down there to get some quarters and hit the bottom of the box. Where's my quarters? [Short pause] I went down to the next corner, bought me a new set of locks for forty dollars, changed the locks. The next day he came to open up, he couldn't get in.

AE: And that was the end of that, huh?

OB: Never did ask me, "Well, why?" Come to find out, Freddy, every time he needed a quarter, he used to ask Eddie for quarters. Smitty's over there? Every time they wanted quarters, he used to ask Eddie for quarters. [Dog barks] So that's what he was doing, counting up them quarters and going to sell them. But then he didn't put the money back in the cigar box. Put it in his pocket.

AE: Right.

OB: He put two thousand dollars in there. He got a bag there, and I looked in there one morning he wasn't here. Anyway, he went someplace, and he left his bag out, so I opened it up [and] I checked his checkbook. He put two thousand dollars in the bank one month. [Short pause] So where do you think he got that from [if] he don't have no other job but this one? [Short pause] That was *my* money. Yeah. [Short pause] Oh, God! The last bar man I had, she went to BJ's over there. I hired her for three days a week. Chartreuse, that's forty dollars a bottle. Crown Royal, half-gallon. Boom. [Gone.] And, uh, Dewar's scotch, half-gallon. [Clears throat] They'd pour that in one week. Her girlfriends would come over with their bicycles all back there where the pool table is. They'd play pool back there. She liked, uh, I used to buy an extra pint of, uh, you know, a fifth of, uh, Crown Royal just for her because she liked it chilled, you know. Then I—I used all half-gallons—I'd have to buy that Smirnoff—not the Smirnoff, the, uh, Stolichnaya vodka and Absolut vodka and hid the bottles in there just to keep them cool. For these people—you don't have to go through the trouble of ice cubes and all—it's chilled up for them and all. Oh, what a beating I took!

[COUNTER: 31:00]

AE: [Quiet laugh] So it's just you. How much longer are you going to be at it you think?

OB: A couple of years.

AE: Yeah?

OB: Maybe this might be my last year. I got to get my license—I'm debating whether up there to get them or not.

AE: What's that?

OB: I'm debating whether to go get another set of license for this year or just lock it up.

AE: Oh. Yeah. [Short pause] Are you just worn out? Time to retire?

OB: Yeah. It's a—it's—it's not like it used to be. But like I told you before, people are not the same. Different class of people. I'd rather lock it up before the joint takes a nosedive, and these people with the rings in their noses and their eyebrows and their—on their tongue and all that shit. Forget it, man. They're starting to come in here. They're looking for dollar beers and all that stuff, you know. They come in with a six-pack of Schlitz beer over there in a bag. And I said, "Hey, man." [He said,] "Well, you don't have no Schlitz, so we went down the block and got a six pack." I said, "Well go down the block ad drink it. Or give me a dollar a can for every one your drink. You're not gonna drink it for nothing." That's what it is. People are different. And before the place goes to the dogs, I mean, I'm gone.

AE: Yeah? Will you sell it or just hang on to it?

OB: No, I ain't gonna sell it. Just lock it up.

AE: Close the doors.

OB: Lock it up.

AE: A little museum to—

OB: Get rid of all the paintings and all—give—donate it to somebody or something, you know? Or have an auction or something. They'd just deteriorate.

AE: That'll be a sad day. I know a lot of people like coming here.

OB: I'd rather do that than let somebody else open it up and [short pause] run different type of a business, you know what I mean?

AE: Yeah.

OB: [Sniffs] It's peaceful and quiet the way it is now. [Short pause] Like that guy—or them four guys, I hope they don't come back because I'll have to tell them, I'll say, "Hey, man. You want to smoke your weed, get out of here." They only had two drinks and then they left. But the guy went back there twice and lit up.

AE: Do you think people just come because they like to hang out here? I mean, the guy who brought his own six-pack in here—

OB: Oh, I got plenty of people come in here. They have little meetings here, you know. No—but—but—three will come in, and two more meet two more. Might have one—eight, nine of them over there bullshittin', you know, and talking or whatever they work—whatever they [are] doing. They take out your little folders and all that stuff, you know? [Quiet laugh] Some people just got snapshots of different shit, you know.

[Short pause]

AE: What about all these photographs on this wall [by the booths] back here? Are those all customers?

OB: Yeah, I used to take pictures of people from out of town. I got Nicholas Cage over there, when he was in here a couple of times. And I got Tommy Lee Jones and [short pause] Alex [Alec] Baldwin. John Goodman used to come here a lot.

AEL Oh, yeah?

OB: Yeah. Well, that's when I used to open in the daytime. He used to pass and stop. Because he's not out at night. [Short pause] But—[Short pause]

AE: Well, any other thoughts about bartending in New Orleans or here at the Saturn?

OB: Well, I guess it's not that bad. I mean, I don't go all over looking at different people—what they're doing, you know?

AE: Yeah.

OB: I don't bar-hop. I don't drink in the daytime. I might take a few drinks late at night. Not lately, anyway. [Short pause] I just went and gave blood yesterday. [Puts his arm on the bar and pushes up his shirt sleeve] You can't see it well. Last week I went, and they got me on that Coumadin [prescription medication] and that blood thinner right now. Trying to regulate it. See what kind of—what milligrams of pills to give me. Like I might have a few more years to live, or I might have ten. I don't know. S—whew, you go up, and when you start coming down, you don't know where to go, eh? When you start—you got to dig that ground, so you dig yourself a hole [laughs], and you get in it and you're dead. [Laughing]

AE: Yeah.

OB: Shit. Yeah. [Stretches and sighs]

AE: Well, I just have one more question for you, I think, and that's about those calendars.

OB: You want a calendar?

AE: I have a calendar. I'll take another one, though.

OB: All right.

AE: But, um, did you—when did you do that. Just from two thousand five?

[Sound of O'Neil putting a calendar on the bar in front of the interviewer]

OB: Oh, I guess about ten years ago, I started getting them made. I don't know exactly when. I started to—to look it up, but then I said, eh, for what.

AE: Yeah?

OB: Some people save them, you know. Memorabilia or whatever.

AE: For your forty-fifth anniversary, this one is. That's pretty incredible. You sell many of those t-shirts?

OB: [O'Neil is walking over to the corner of the bar looking for something] Yeah.

[Short pause]

AE: What's the story with all the candy in these Gatorade bottles?

OB: [Back at the bar] Oh, I had more than that up there. What I did, I used to go to the store and buy candies, you know, like the Mary Jane's and stuff like that, you know. The Coconut Long Boys. Stuff they had when I was kid coming up that you don't see everywhere, you know? So if somebody wants a little taste, they go grab some.

[Sound of O'Neil putting calendar on bar]

AE: Thank you, sir. All right. Well. I appreciate your time. Giving us your story. It's a good one. And a good bar.

[Sound of O'Neil putting a collection of Saturn Bar pens and a pocket calendar on the bar, which he also gives to the interviewer. Then sound of drawer squeaking closed.]

[COUNTER: 36:00]

[END]