

GENE BOURG

Customer, Charlie's Steakhouse – New Orleans, LA

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Interview Date: February 16, 2007

Interviewer: Sara Roahen

Southern Foodways Alliance

Project: New Orleans Eats/Guardians of Tradition

[Begin Gene Bourg on Charlie's Interview]

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Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's February 16, 2007; I'm in New Orleans, Louisiana and I'm talking with Gene Bourg about Charlie's Steak House. And could you first just tell us what your profession is?

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Gene Bourg: I'm a writer and editor.

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SR: So you can just go ahead and give us some memories.

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GB: Well the first time—the first time I went to Charlie's Steak House, I think I was in high school, or maybe at Tulane, and I was in there with some friends. And at Charlie's—I didn't know that there was no written menu. So after my friends informed me of that, the waiter came over and took the orders, and I told him what I wanted and then I said *And I'll have some broccoli au gratin*. And I said—he said *We ain't got no broccoli au gratin*. And I said *Well what about the guy who is at the next table over there? He's got some on his table*. The waiter said *That's 'dem, not you*. And then another time, this was like, I don't know—I can't put—maybe it was in the '70s or something like that; I was again at Charlie's with some friends, one of whom had just come back from a trip to France and had picked up some affectations. When it came

time to order the drinks, my friend says *I'll have a Pernod*. And the waiter said *A pair of what?* **[Laughs]** And then, when I was reviewing restaurants, I went to Charlie's, took all the notes, did what I needed to do, and then I called the restaurant to get some confirmation of some facts, and Miss Dottye got on the phone. And I said *Let me—let me ask you*; I said *You know, I know you don't have a written menu and you just tell people what cut of steak that you have*. And I said *Can you give me the weights of each of these: the filet, the Porterhouse, the rib-eye, the strip?* She says *Well it all depends*; she says *I claim that the weight should be without the bones, but these guys who run this place say you've got to weigh the bones too*. **[Laughs]** I don't remember what the weights were, but that was her—there was some distinction apparently—or some disagreement on how steaks should be weighed at Charlie's Steak House.

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SR: Can I ask you one question?

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GB: Yeah.

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SR: So after you were treated sort of brusquely with the broccoli au gratin, you wanted to go back?

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GB: Oh of course. It was—you couldn't boycott Charlie's Steak House. *[Laughs]* It was like—it was too much of an institution and some of the—too many of the people wanted to go. I mean I didn't—I didn't go monthly, but you know several times a year I'd go to Charlie's and if people wanted to go, I'd of course be part of the group, and actually I'd be pretty enthusiastic about it.

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SR: And did you grow up going there, or was it something you discovered as—

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GB: No.

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SR: —a young adult?

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GB: I discovered Charlie's when I was in high school.

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SR: In high school?

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GB: Yep. I went with high school friends. I went to school uptown, and Charlie's was uptown.

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SR: One more question: do you remember what kind of rating you gave them?

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GB: I think I must have given them a two, because the rating was based not only the food, which was okay, although I mentioned that when the steaks were brought to the table they were sizzling a lot, and if you didn't watch out you could acquire the oiliest complexion in the three parishes if you got too close to the steaks. *[Laughs]* But what—the restaurants—I rated them also on cleanliness, which Charlie's was not. It was not one of Charlie's strengths, let's put it that way.

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SR: No.

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GB: Comfort, atmosphere, so on and so forth, so Charlie's didn't really get a lot of points.

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SR: Right.

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GB: Everything but the food—but that was fine.

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SR: Do you remember a Charlie being around?

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GB: No. Not that—I was—he was never pointed out to me. I—I honestly don't know if he was even alive. I can't remember if anybody mentioned his name.

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SR: What about cooks? Did you ever meet a cook?

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GB: No, no; the dining room was upstairs, and I think the kitchen was downstairs if I'm not mistaken. But I'm not sure.

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SR: Okay, all right. Well thanks, Gene.

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GB: Glad—glad to be of help.

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[End Gene Bourg on Charlie's Interview]