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An Oral History with Liz Stagg of the Oxford Farmers' Market

Liz Stagg

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Transcript for An Oral History with Liz Stagg of the Oxford Farmers' Market Store

by Southern Studies graduate student Victoria De Leone

Introduction

After about two weeks of trying to set up a time for me to interview Liz, I drove out to Taylor. She texted me directions for her friend Laurie's house. Just past Taylor Grocery, there's a narrow dirt road that leads to a string of small cabins. After turning down the wrong fork once, I parked at the very last one and found Liz sitting outside on the back porch.

I was interviewing Liz about The Farmers' Market Store, a small store in Oxford, MS that offered local produce, meats, dairy, and other food items. Liz and her husband owned and operated the store for 12 years. Her husband passed away in 2015, and Liz closed the store in October 2016. I was trying to understand how Liz saw her place in the community, and what drove her to open, and close, the store.

The first minute and a half of the interview seems to have been cut off. In that minute I introduced Liz, explained what the outcome of the interview would be, and asked her about her and her husband's background prior to the opening of the store.

This oral history was conducted as a final project for Catarina Passidomo's class on Southern Foodways in the Fall of 2016. Along with the transcript and the edited video, I wrote a short essay connecting the oral history to themes we explored in class discussions and readings, such as immigration, the "New South" as a construct, and women as bearers of food culture.

Transcript

Liz Stagg, Farmer's Market Store, Oxford, MS

Date: November 11, 2016

Location: Taylor, MS

Interviewers: Victoria De Leone

Transcription: Victoria De Leone

Liz Stagg: We both worked in restaurants, bars, that kind of whatever that kind of service industry, various types of service industry jobs. And we just came here and thought, yeah we can do this and we can make this better, and part of it was having worked in restaurants and, because it was Outer Banks, the place where I worked was very, it was actually, it was sister restaurants and one was very small, maybe 80 tables, one was huge, maybe 400... 80 tables, 80 seats... and the other one was like 400 seats, and downstairs and upstairs, an outside deck, parties, three bars, whooooo wide open, touristy and all. The place that he worked was very upscale, beautiful, serene, \$300 bottles of wine, food that I had not really ever heard of, kind of stuff, complete difference in those two, and so, in just, seeing all of that and both of us having come from traditions of, um, of food traditions, just our families, he was Italian, mostly, or his, yeah I should say it like that you would classify his tradition as being Italian, his food tradition. Mine was South Louisiana and we just kinda went, yeah, we could do this. And then that's it! We did it, that's all! And so that was, we did it from June of 2004, is that right? Yeah. And he, in the course of doing that, as we got into that store it was really not anything except... is that true? Yeah that's true, it was not really anything except produce. And so being there and it was dirrrty [Sing song voice] and it was dirty and it had almost no refrigeration, no equipment, no, not a whole lot of display

potential or, you know, display, what, stuff there. And so just as we went and got a little bit more established with regular customers kinda went, well we could do this, we could add this, we could add this, yeah this is, people asked for this we could sell this, we could get this, we could have a ready supply of this. So in time, um, in time, slowly, added all sorts of equipment, refrigeration equipment, and display equipment, and just made it a little easier to operate. Got a walk in cooler that kind of stuff, and molded it more into a very small, more full service, store. Where people could come, the idea was, to listen to what people were saying about things that they wanted but couldn't find, or stuff that we felt like this was a good match for what our customers are, um, and this is stuff that we can get our hands on, being that, you know, being the store that is, what, ten square feet or so, you don't have huge, you can't call up and go, yeah I need all this. You have to search it all out, you know? And you have to be able to find places where you can get smaller quantities of retail stuff, that was kind of a chore. So anyway, so over time, blah blah blah, did all of that [tshhhhhh], Um, there was a fella that we had bought, that did his, he had a store on Highway 6 in Panola County um, and it was a, he raised hogs and he opened this little retail store as a means to sell his meat. We started buying meat from him, years later he didn't want to do it anymore, because he's kind of the person who likes to be much more outside running around rather than tied down somewhere. So after several years he didn't want to do it anymore, asked us if we wanted to buy it. We were like nehhhhhhhhhh, I don't know. And then finally we said, yeah ok. So we took that over, my husband was out there, I was in Oxford, he was doing all the meat stuff, butchering, making sausage, curing meats, all of the, and that sort of expanded. What else can you do out there to, that we can sell to the store. Making ready made stuff, um, things like, what, hummus, salsa, other kinds of salsa, just, whatever, it just evolved, always evolving. He died in January of 2015. And so I kept it open until October of 2016 and just went, meh, time to do another thing. So, I'm doing another thing. So right now I'm working at Grit here in Taylor just as sort of a, just doing whatever they need me to do, mostly catering. Prep, whatever, whatever they tell me to do. No front of house, all back of house, it's been quite fun. They're lovely, lovely, lovely people who really take, they're really professional about their product, but so not uptight in the way that they do things. And working with them, they treat all of their people so respectfully and with such kindness it's really quite nice to witness. It's not like always that, in any job, and maybe especially so in the restaurant business, so that is that.

TD: So what was it like for you guys to move into Oxford and open a business without already having a base here?

LS: Ummmmm. It was hard. Because, not having, what was supposed to be the plan was that the fellow who owned it previously was supposed to really help us out in terms of, we were going to buy, essentially buy, whatever he grew, and then he would be, not aggressively walking around on the street doing this but he would be a background support of everything. That lasted about two weeks. Because he just got, he's kind of a crochety old, ogre, um, and he got really angry after about two weeks and that all just fell apart. So, we just had to go and figure it out and make it work and represent yourself. And we did have, blessedly, there was a fella who, and older fella that worked for him and he was a hustler in a good way, I mean that as a compliment. And he said well, I'll stay on and work with y'all, and so I'll just help, you know for like six months or so I'll just stay and work, because I don't have anything else to do anyway. So why not? And he did, and he just sort of showed us around a little bit to just give us a base, so we weren't totally, starting from scratch about how does one find anything. And it just kind of grew from there and I think that a lot of it was just based upon, I cannot, I cannot over emphasize how janky and dirty that store was, and [long pause] what is a word, what is a not terrible word? How rough it was in there in a bad way, of, you know, just janky people coming in and hanging around, just people with

nothing to do, so when people would come in there who had not been there in a while and there was a whole different look and aura and vibe, they were like, [high pitched] what, what are you, what are you doing and who are you and oh my gosh look it's clean, and did y'all put a new floor? I am not kidding you, at least twenty times, did y'all put a new floor in? Uh, no ma'am, we just mopped it. Um, and so, just by the strength of, I don't know the force of what you're, the force of your work and the force of your personality, just made it work, but it was not easy, that part of like, breaking into, I shouldn't say it like that but, coming in as just a new person like, hey y'all, what's up? Come on over. That was not an easy thing to do. But we did, it happened, it wasn't the hardest thing in the world but it wasn't easy.

TD: Do you remember who your first real regular customer was?

LS: Hmm, ummmmmmm, I wouldn't say, the first person that I, that, well, the first person that comes to mind is, um, there's a woman, her name is Michelle, what's her last name now, Edwards? Thompson? Michelle Thompson. Who's actually, she and I became friendly and she's actually the same age as I am. She was the first person that I really remember, who, cause she's loud, and she talks a lot, who was like [loud] hey! What are you doing! Who are you! Wha! you know. That, she was the first person I really remember who stayed a customer from the beginning to the end. There are others but she's the person that comes to mind. And, there are others who, from the beginning were terribly supportive and happy and pleasant and funny and, but some of those people that I'm thinking about they died along the way.

TD: So it was 11 years?

LS: 12

TD: That's a really long time for a business, especially one based on food, to stay open. I'm sure that you have a ton, but do you have any specific stories of the community supporting you guys or, maybe a specific customer that came in on a regular basis?

LS: I think, here's the thing that I think about with that. It's more, um, I mean certainly there are certain people that I can point to, but this was a thing that was always a standout um, for us, just a conversation that we've had many times. Is that, you break things down or you come to, not that you lose sight of the individual person that you're dealing with, but you come to identify certain demographics so to speak, and the thing that was a real, for me, and for Frank as well, and by the way I should say this, my last name is different from his, his last name is Coppola see oh pee pee oh el ay, like the director but pronounced differently. The thing that was interesting was, because you sell food, and because people have to eat all the time, then of course it's not like you're going to see someone once every six months when they come in to get a new pair of shoes, you're going to see them pretty frequently, regardless of whether they're really coming there to shop or if they just come every two or three days to get a banana on their way to work. But, you did readily, it became readily apparent, different, I don't know if demographic is the right word to use perhaps, but social groups. So you had all, Hispanic, which really, in Oxford, pretty well translates into Mexican, even though there are some people who were from, um, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, in large parts Mexican. People who were from India, people who were from China, Korea, little bit of Japan, people from Russia, and Eastern Europe, people who, working class, people who, like lots of the, particularly women, who work for the university, like people who do facilities work at the university. Old, rich, white ladies with huge diamonds on their fingers who are very specific about what they want. Soccer mommy type people, people who want to eat a big fat steak. That

part was really interesting to see that, and you would come to know that if you got something new in, or if you found something new you could come to know, with somebody who was a customer who you could count on being there every week, such, to the degree to where if they weren't going to be there the next week, they would be like, going out of town, not going to be here for a while, be back, that you could go, come here, we got this thing and you need to eat this, you need to try this. that was really, um, just an interesting thing to witness. And it was nice to, because for some of those people, um, people who are perhaps under represented, under respected, whatever, that they could come into a store where, and, you know, in part because the store is so small that you, that it's really easy to speak to people, and part because that's how you behave when you run a business, or whether or not you, or if you don't run a business, you still behave like that, um, but to be able to have a place like that where those people can come and go like, what's up girl, you know, that kind of thing where people felt like, I felt like those people were happy coming there because they just had a, perhaps a different experience than maybe they would have in other circumstances, you know? That sounds kind of braggy, but you know, it's true.

TD: It's definitely a wider cross section of Oxford than most businesses probably get.

LS: Hell yeah girl! I can't, I, to be honest, Laurie and I talked about this a lot, because she worked at the store for, I don't know, a couple years, um, in trying to figure out, what other place can you say that of, we can't think of one. Because even if you're talking about something people, maybe the gas station? Or the beer store? Where people go all the time? And they go to the same place so they come to, you come to know the people that are there, and because its a small venue? Maybe that. But perhaps not as personal, because if you're buying gas or beer you pretty much just walk in and go you know, you don't really shop. So, I think it was actually quite, quite special, in that regard.

TD: What went into the decision to close the store this year?

LS: It was just time for me to do something different, be somewhere different. Um, twelve years is a long time to do anything, and I am not, its not really my personality to be, [long pause] that's a, for me especially that's a long time to do anything. And, all of my family is in, pretty much all of my family is in South Louisiana, I want to go be more available to them, I was running two stores by myself. That's not, you know in the whole of 2016 I, maybe five days I didn't go to work, didn't go to that store? *pshh* No way, man! That's, that's just not, I mean it was a very considered decision and it was a very difficult decision. I didn't necessarily feel great about it, but, you know, my mother is 82 and will outlive me but nonetheless, she's 82. I have nieces and nephews, I have siblings, and I really like all of them, so at some point I want to go back there to be able to be around them, to hang out with them, and South Louisiana is, to me, sort of a compelling place to be. I like being there, so, um, that was it. And it was, and also it's time for someone who can bring new, if you look at it as an entity totally separate from yourself, if you have respect for it as an entity that has nothing to do with you, its time for somebody else to come in and go, let's just be different, let's just be different, some things maybe will be like eight thousand times better, some things will maybe be a half of a percentage point worse. But I think its all, all potentiality to be better, rather than worse. I'm fully in support of someone else, um, just, new energy, new vibe, new outlook, new perspectives, new everything, you know? And to respect the institution of it. I have carried enough onion sacks for, and banana boxes, for the whole of my life, so, [laughs] now I'll cut onions and make banana pudding instead.

TD: Have you already sold the store?

LS: No, but its potentiality, there's [pause] it's a possibility. I should say that. It's a possibility that that, um, sort of been working on some things with that and it's a possibility. Excuse me one second, I'm going to take these off and I'm going to grab [pause to tape, Liz gets another beer, removes sunglasses]

TD: So you were talking about, it is a possibility that the store is going to be sold. Do you think it will end up being a similar institution?

LS: Yes. [laughs] No, I mean, what my preference is, my preference is, rather than somebody, [pause] my preference is that somebody will buy it and keep it going, not as it is, but in the same genre, you know? That is my preference, and hopefully that's going to be what happens. That's as much as I can really, reliably say, you know?

TD: You still feel like the need for a small grocery store exists in Oxford?

LS: Um, I suppose that's up to the people, right? I mean, I think [long pause] even though it's not the same kind of thing, but where I grew up, that kind of thing was all over the place, and that was the place that you would prefer to go, like, for example if you wanted something, in particular I should say, if you wanted something that was a regional thing or a local thing. Like, for example, muscadines, or green peanuts, or melataw(sp?) or watermelon, even though other big grocery stores will have that, that is sort of like, um, there's a niche for that, and as well, certainly, a niche for being able to be sort of a middle person between small, local people who are doing their thing, and you being able to go, let me bring your, let me bring all of y'all's stuff together in one spot. And certainly a bigger grocery store has, certainly it has advantages that a place like that could never compete with. On the other side, there's things that that store can do, that big places can't do, and one of the things that I always thought was [long pause] me as a person who will go to shop somewhere, and you know how this is, once you have worked on a, in any sort of service, any sort of service job, whether it's working at a restaurant, or clothing store, at a bank, anything like that where you have to deal with the public, it changes your perspective on how one sees any sort of retail operation, you know? So, to be able to go to a place like that, where it's easy, you can park, you can leave your dog in the car or your kid in the car, you don't have to be worried about it, you can tell the person standing at the front counter, going, my dog's in the car so, I left the car on but he's ok, so watch out. Or my kid, don't think I'm bad, left my kid in the car he drives me crazy, you know, that kind of thing, that easy peasy in and out, but also because you have someone there that goes, what you doing girl, how you feeling? How's everything for you? And, of course in addition to that, it's good stuff, that's reliable, that reasonably priced that if you get something that's not good, you can come back, and you don't have to bring your little ticket or nothing like that because everybody knows you, and go, I got that watermelon *wrong answer noise* you know, I didn't bring it back, but it was bad. Oh, you know, it's ok babe, take that, it's fine, I know. That I think, is, um, Why would you not want that? And, I don't know, maybe people don't, I don't know, maybe that whole way of being is an anachronism, I don't know, but why would you not want to have that? You know? Why would you not, and, you know, it's on a side of town where there's plenty of people there, there's plenty of traffic, going into Oxford now is a pain in the ass, all of that. In and out, pleasant experience, good stuff, good prices, lovely service if I may say so myself. So, yeah, I think it's, yes! I do think that, I definitely think that, I think its sort of a, in a world that is increasingly impersonal and robotic, it is a

pleasure to go into any place where people stop what they're doing and look in your face and speak to you, kindly. It's important.

TD: You mentioned a lot working with some of the local farmers. Can you tell me a little bit more about any of those relationships? How did you find them? What was the relationship like?

LS: Um, some of the people, we found because, um, actually, some of the people we found because they were customers, some of the people found us, through word of mouth, some of the people we found through word of mouth, and some of the people we sought out. Like we just did research and found stuff and went, oh yeah, let's try that. Um, how was it. It was fine, it was really fine! It's, um, you have to be, this is probably true in general in produce, um, you had to be able to tell people, like let's say that somebody brings you, whatever. First of all you can't be gullible. And you can't discount the fact that, whether or not somebody is intentionally doing this or I don't know they need twenty bucks because they need to buy a crack rock, or whatever. You had to be watchful of what you were doing all the time, because you can't always know until you cut something open, and blah blah blah, you had to give people the benefit of the doubt, but you can't be a pushover. And then you have to finesse it about how to work it out, so in general what we did was, very seldom, you know, you bring your stuff, we look at it, we'd make a, you know, we'd talk about price, blah blah blah, and if somebody had some number that was completely, no way dude, that ain't going to happen, you would just go *eh* no, or if it was something that you thought was maybe, eh that's a little bit much, but ok, here's the deal, you want, whatever, \$5 a pound for this. Ok, this first time, this is what we're going to do. \$5 a pound? You got it brother. Let's see what happens. If it sells, and it's great, sure. But if it doesn't, we're going to revisit that. And usually that worked out fine. I mean, we had people just as time progressed, we had people that we really, um, just really grew to depend on in, I shouldn't say for product, dependent not eh relationship, the product, yes, but the relationship, so that it becomes a thing where, whoever it is, whether it's someone who's a seasonal producer of a given item, or somebody who is a more year round producer, that you could you know, text on your way home, and go, bro what's up I need that. Or, that, it became, it was very easy. And then if it wasn't, if it was a thing that wasn't easy, well then, you just didn't deal with them anymore. But that was really, I'm pleased with that, I'm pleased with how we did that, I'm pleased with the ways that we made things possible for people who deserved to have things possible. And that's kind of a thing that I think that we could both, that both Frank and I could look at and go, you know, we had people come into the store who were just starting out on doing something, whether they were relatively young people or a little bit, you know, not like super young but not old as me, but to come in and go, I got this idea, and I think I want to do this, and what do you think, do you think you could do this, what's your opinion? And then to really shepherd those people along as they did that, and watching what you were able to do for them, not in terms of just their own economics, but in terms of advice, and hand holding and, stupidity, you know acting silly, and the way that I think that we mentored people, perhaps not even intentionally, just how it worked out, because they didn't really know, because they had someone that they could sit and talk to, and get input from, and 'how's this working for you? what do you think about this? I want to change this, do you think that would work?' To have someone that they can really sit with to give them that other side that they couldn't see, didn't have the opportunity to see for themselves. It's really kind of, kind of groovy. Really pretty groovy. And it was really, that part was really quite fun. That, a lot of those people were really quite fun.



TD: It sounds like relationships are really the basis of your business structure, both for the customers and for the producers. Are there any of those relationships that you're planning on bringing forward? People that you've kept in touch with, plan on keeping in touch with?

LS: Oh hell no! No I'm just kidding. Um, you know that is a really interesting way, that is a really interesting thing that you have just said. That is really interesting. I never really thought about it like that. But that's kind of what it's always about, anyway. It's kind of what your whole life is about, if you do it right perhaps that's what your whole life is about anyway. Yeah for sure, yes, there are people that, um. In fact, how crazy is this, so there's, so I was at Grit today, you know, peon at Grit, cutting some onions, you know, which is fine, which is great, which is actually quite great, and so, there's a company in Memphis, it's called Off The Dock, and they do all kinds of stuff, one of the fellows who is a, I guess he's a salesman there, previously had his own company in Memphis, and he was an importer, and you could just get all kind of crazy stuff from them, just, you know, cheese, like real cheese, cheese from Spain, cheese from Italy, cheese from wherever, and all kinds of olives, and gray sea salt, and just really specialty items, and he, so he had that place in Memphis. Over time, and maybe this happened maybe four or five years ago, he closed his place and went to work for this larger concern that does a bigger, does a lot of seafood and stuff like that. But we still got stuff from them, and mostly really nice cheeses, and so today, there's a fellow who's a driver for them who used to come to the store, who is the, just, kind and great and wonderful, and last week when I was at Grit, he came in and I was like, Dude! I've been hoping to see you! I'm sorry, I meant to call y'all, I'm going to write y'all a note, but I'm so glad to see you! And he's like 'Oh my god! what are you...' So he goes back, and tells this guy Michael, hey, you know Liz closed the store and she's at Grit. So today I'm at Grit and he calls me up and I'm at Grit and somebody comes and gets me and says, um, there's a guy on the phone for you, Michael, from Off the Dock? And I'm like, what? How does, what? Larry the driver says to Michael, oh you know, Liz closed the store, but she's at Grit, and you can call her there, because they get stuff from Grit, from, Grit gets stuff from Off the Dock, and I'm like, what are you doing? And he's like, girl I just wanted to hear your voice. I'm like, oh my gosh, that is really crazy. So, um, that's kind of nice. And then, yeah, a lot of, in particular, those people who were, um, the people who we did a lot of work with in terms of produce. Yeah I will

definitely keep in touch with those people. And, you know, in a capacity of whatever, of just being a fool with those people that you had such a foolish time with so many times, or if it's something more, you know, what you need, baby, how you feeling? What, how's it going? You know, that kind of thing, you know, mommy, mom, mom is kind of stuff for some of those people who are younger, you know, yeah, for sure, for sure! It's kind of funny, that kind of thing, to go, it's a joke that Laurie and I used to always tell. Not that we know everybody in town, because we don't, but you can, you could count on the fact of going, you know you're going to the Dollar, and you always run into a customer, and I told her, you know, *ugh* I'm trying to go to the Dollar to buy some tampons. And then here comes this 90 year old black man going, 'Hey girl, what you doing?' I'm like, I'm just buying tampons. Which is really quite funny. But nice! It was really nice! Yeah, so yeah, and it's interesting too, like a lot of the people that, like, I was talking about Anna, and there's a couple of other people that, who came to Oxford because they were somehow associated, doing something with the University, who have since left. But I still stay in touch with those, not a whole lot, just a few, that I still stay in touch with, so you have to be thankful that that brought all that together, you know? Yeah, that's nice.

TD: And you said that you want to go back to South Louisiana on a regular basis because of your family. Are you planning on moving back down there?

LS: At some point. I'm going to be here for a long while, though. I've got a lot to do. And, besides that I just kind of want to, you know, I don't want to undertake a whole, doing all of that? At one time? That was enough. So just, you know, slide into the next thing. Let it all develop organically about what the next thing will be. But for now? Yeah I'm just going to hang out a bit, you know, work, and hang out and, yeah, and wait for people to call me and see, you know, and interview me, I'm going to wait on that and see what happens next. [Laughs] Nothing. Nothing going to happen.

TD: It sounds like you and your husband both worked in a lot of service industry jobs. What drew you to food in the first place?

LS: Hmm, I don't know. I mean, I think, I mean part of that, the whole lifestyle of being in service, there's something kind of appealing to me, about the lifestyle of that, of, of doing kind of, doing sort of like the quiet work and then going, look! And then also, just the whole, um, environment of a restaurant and all that, I just kind of like, he and I both always kind of liked that, and he was, he had amazing, even though he was terribly, terribly introverted, you'd never know it, because he had amazing, amazing people skills. And funny, and smart, and hard working and quick witted, and blah blah blah. He was the kind of person that could readily, in a moment, have somebody call him and go, we need you to be at the state dinner in about twenty minutes. And he'd be like, ok yeah I'll be there. And then when it was all over, we need you to run down to the corner and get us like five crack rocks from Ray Ray. Ok, I got it. I mean he was just amazing in how he could do all of that. I don't know, it just seemed, for the both of us, it was always just appealing, for no particular reason I guess, except we just liked, the life, and both liked cooking, and didn't see cooking as, you know didn't see food as a fetish, didn't see cooking as an oddity. Just a thing that, both of us were sort of raised like that, it's just what you did. It was not, you take care with it and you were serious about how you did things but you didn't get all crazy about it. It's just part of, part of who, part of what your culture was, you know? It's funny, today my brother, I'm supposed to be going to Louisiana on Saturday, on Sunday, and so I'm like, calling, ok you all who's cooking, what we doing, who's doing what? And so my brother's going to make a gumbo, and he sent me a picture today, texted me a picture and he said something and I was like, I don't know what this is.

So I sent him, I said, what is that? He said I'm going to send you another picture. It was a picture of his roux. He sent me a picture of the roux. I was like, Ok, looks good, good color friend, good to go. That's just, kind of the way, and it was nice because Frank, because he was Italian, and he did all the stuff, made all of this, you know made Italian sausage, made chorizo, made bresaola, made pancetta, made prosciutto, made salami, made bologna, made mortadella, didn't do it all the time, made all kind of different, he made a sweet potato sausage one time, he made an apple, pork and apple sausage. It was nice, that part, that creative part that he was able to bring to all of that. Not only nice for the store, not only nice for me, but really nice to see him put his brain on that, and work it all out. It was really, a nice thing to have witnessed.

TD: With any job there are positives and negatives. Were there maybe two or three things that you didn't like doing? And then like two or three highlights?

LS: Look how old I am! That's what I didn't like. This has whipped my ass! No, I'm just kidding. What I didn't like. Hmm, hm, hm What did I not like? I hated the paperwork. God dog I hated that. It's not my forte. I can do it for somebody else, never liked doing it for myself. Um, it was, um, sometimes, I mean there would be days where literally, I am not exaggerating, you would speak, personally, to people, you would speak to a hundred and fifty people a day. It's exhausting. And, that part, while I'm not going to say that I didn't like it, it was, that was exhausting. And, to have to do the whole gammut, of who you were talking to, you know, like to have to change, like waiting tables somewhat, to have to change your way of being, your personality depending on who you were talking to. Not change your personality, but change your presentation so to speak, depending on who you're talking to. Sometimes that was fine, and sometimes people were just crazy. Like, crazy, whiny, drunk, demented, crazy to where sometimes you have to go, you know what, you going, you getting out right now, you're getting out this door right now. And if you don't I'm going to come over there and I'm going to kill you, get out of my store. That kind of thing. Which was actually kind of funny. Um, what else did I not like? Hm, This is probably a thing that is true in any sort of business, that, if you undertake to do it. It gets to be, it's stressful to not know what in the world is going to happen on a given day. So you go in with an idea of, OK, this is this day, you know, we're getting this delivered, this person's coming, I got to do this. And then you get there and within thirty minutes that's all fallen apart, because your coolers not broken, I mean your cooler has stopped working, and unexpectedly a pipe bursts and so there's three inches of water in the store, or everything froze because it was cold last night, or somebody was supposed to be coming, and they said they were bringing all this to you, but no, they are not coming and they did not have all the stuff that they said they were going to have. And one of your workers woke up and is sick, you know that kind of stuff, where you go, just, you know that's just part of it, but that is challenging. Um, I don't know if there's anything I particularly, I hated this part. This is the part that, I did hate this. That I don't think I will, I will never not feel that we could have done better, that we could have, I mean, even though pretty much the whole of the time that we were there, I am thankful and blessed that we had such fine, lovely, great people working with us, and even when they weren't, they frequently were, but there were people that worked for us that I will still stay in contact and I will never not be in contact with Laurie, Nate, who worked with Frank, I will never not be in contact with Nate. That was so fortunate, but I will never not feel like there are things that we could have done differently, done better, improved upon, blah blah blah.that we didn't, but essentially it was the basically the two of us the whole time, so you kind of have to give yourself a pass on that as well.

TD: What were some of those things?

LS: Well, I just wanted it to be more stuff, more product, more inventory, wanted to do something more with prepared, like really to have a kitchen area, to set something up in the back that we could expand the, to build a little outbuilding for the outside so that we could move some of our storage out there. And expand more the square footage of the store. To be more aggressive with, um, guerrilla marketing than we ever were, because basically, the whole time we were there, it was basically word of mouth. Everything that we did was basically word of mouth. Not the whole of it, but a good 90% of it was, and so I think that, not that we neglected that, it just never really happened in the way that we both wanted it to happen.

TD: So I'm going to start wrapping up a little bit. Do you have any other stories or things that you would like to say?

LS: Oh! I do!

TD: Ok! Great!

LS: I have two. One of them is, you cannot talk [yells to Laurie, who's inside] Hey Lucy! Can't talk about the Farmer's Market without talking about Jake Barr! Oh Jake Barr. So you know Molly Barr Road, right? Ok, so Molly Barr was Jake Barr's mother. Jake Barr has no idea how old he is. Sometimes he says 85, sometimes he says 92, don't know. Can't read, can't write, can kind of figure. Jake Barr kind of came with the store. And so now, he doesn't drive anymore. He doesn't live too far from the store, he doesn't drive anymore, but he was kind of, just kind of a fixture, of the store. Here comes Jake Barr, just going to come sit down and, like, do whatever he's doing. And we, I mean, we just sort of, Hey Jake Barr, What you doing? Need a Coke babe? What you need? You know, whatever. There was just never a thing, I will not ever not think of Jake Barr. And then another person that really sticks out for me, and this is a, at some point I will figure out some way to document this, there's a woman named Lillian McEwen, and she is, three days older, no three days younger than my mother. And the first time we ever met her at the store, Frank and I were both there together, and she's about, she's tiny little woman, very dark skinned, um, kind of, she's not like frail but she's like small framed, but tough little nut. And the first time she ever came in the store, and it was funny that he laughed about this, she asked Frank, 'Are these peaches clear seed?' and he was like, are they what? And she's like 'Are they clear seed', he's like, I don't know what you're, I don't know what you're asking me. And she, you know, is it a free stone peach, but she said clear seed, and she said to him, 'Son if you don't know what that is, you ain't going to be in this store very long.' And he cracked up laughing. He thought that was so, and that began the beginning of our having a thing with her, talking to her. So now she has become, I don't know, she's just become such a touchstone, particularly for me. And I talk to her maybe once a month, to go, hey what you doing? What's going on? And she's gotten more, she used to be able to, I'd say within the last year or so, she doesn't drive herself too much. But she used to drive herself all over and do whatever she wanted to but now she's a little more infirm. She's not sickly or anything like that but she just doesn't feel as confident in doing that. And she has been such a lesson to me in so many ways of, I don't know what, I don't even know how to characterize that, but she has just been a gift. A gift! And she's the only person I know, and I mean, she's 82 as well you know, and because I've known her all this time, I know all of her history, and asked her a million questions about how she grew up and all her story you know, it's intriguing, and just as anybody I suppose who gets to be 82, you know, plenty of heartbreak and woe. Right? Plenty of disappointments, but she's just so solid, she's just solid, solid, solid. She's the only person I know who calls me up, and I go, hey what you doing Miss Lynn, and she goes, Grrrrrrl, what you

doing? You know, girl you know you ain't worth a shit but I love you. And I go, Miss Lillian you know you're the only person who can say that to me, you know? And she goes, Aw girl I'm just kidding, what you doing baby? How you feeling? Just, just like that, that is the kind of thing that makes you go, ok, this is why I was supposed to be here all that time, to have known a person, just with that solidity, with that faith, and she's funny, and, I don't know, she's just awesome. So, that's the two people that I can't not mention. There's other, but those two are people that I feel like, I will definitely carry that with me through everything.

TD: I don't have any more questions right now, but feel free to text me if you think of anything else you would like to add.

LS: No, that was enough talking, don't you think? That was a lot of talking right there.

TD: I'm just going to have you, one more time because I'm afraid I missed it the first time, just say your name and that you were the former owner

LS: My name is Liz Stagg, Es Tee Ay Gee Gee, former owner of the Farmer's Market Store in Oxford, Mississippi, along with my husband Frank Coppola, Cee Oh Pee Pee Oh El Ay.



Victoria De Leone grew up in mountainous Central Oregon. Trading the small community in the woods for a slightly larger one on an island, she studied food cultures and immigration narratives at NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. After completing her undergraduate studies, she served as a community manager for a grocery delivery startup in Brooklyn. Tori just completed her first year of the Southern Studies MA program and is a Nathalie Dupree Graduate Fellow with the Southern Foodways Alliance.