

MARK CAVE: What is your name?

YOKUM: My full name is Peterson Moon Yokum.

CAVE: And can you spell that?

PETERSON YOKUM: P-E-T-E-R-S-O-N, first name. M-double O-N,  
middle name. Yokum, Y-O-K-U-M.

CAVE: And I'm Mark Cave with the Historic New Orleans  
Collection. It's Wednesday, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016. We're here  
at the Williams Research Center at 410 Chartres Street, and  
we're talking about your life and your memories of the  
French Quarter. Where were you born?

YOKUM: I was born here in New Orleans, at Baptist Hospital,  
but my parents lived at 824 Royal when I was first born.  
When I was a year old, they moved to the big old house on  
Prytania Street, 3211 Prytania, near Louisiana, until I was  
17, and then I moved back into -- well, the Quarter, into  
my grandmother's house, at 723 Toulouse.

CAVE: What year were you born?

YOKUM: Nineteen forty-eight, December 26<sup>th</sup>.

CAVE: Talk about your dad.

YOKUM: His name was Paul -- I mean, Jules August de Fazende  
Yokum. His daddy was a German, Yokum, but on his mother's  
side, they were the de Fazendes that landed with Bienville,

and was one of Bienville's right-hand guys. He even became the consul general when Bienville went back to France for a while. He's buried over here in Saint Louis, number one.

CAVE: What did he do for a living?

YOKUM: My father? Well, he was originally in import/export, and then he mostly did real estate.

CAVE: Talk about your mom.

YOKUM: My mother was a Navy brat. Her father, that bought my house that I lived in on Toulouse Street in the '20s, he was Commander Alvin Hovey-King, and he was from -- I want to say somewhere in Indiana. But he was -- he built ships for the Navy, World War I. My mother had gone to [Newcomb?], and I think they moved -- he and his wife -- moved and bought a house here in New Orleans. The original perfume shop was where your Historic Collection is, on Royal Street. One of the -- it was one of two sides. Then they bought the house on Toulouse Street and moved the perfume shop over there.

CAVE: So you were born -- or you grew up initially in the Quarter?

YOKUM: I was one years old when I was living in the French Quarter. I don't remember that. But since 1966 is when I moved into my house. I went eight years to art school in New York, and two different years at university. But since

1966, I kept every -- that was where I lived, 723 Toulouse.

CAVE: Do you have brothers or sisters?

YOKUM: I have a brother and a sister. She's no longer living. My grandmother started Hove. My mother ran it, and then my sister ran it, and then she passed away.

CAVE: Talk a little bit more about Hove. What do you know about it?

YOKUM: It was the Depression, and my grandmother, my mother's mother -- Lillian Moon was her name. She was from Philadelphia. Quakers up there, the Moons. She was very prim and proper. She had dabbled with making her own perfumes, and then decided to make a business out of it after my grandfather passed away. She started the Hove Perfume Company. That was originally at the... (break in audio)

CAVE: You were talking about Hove.

YOKUM: Yes. She invented 64 different *odeurs*, and she would make it with -- in the old way, with the right oils imported from France and around the world. She ran that -- oh, I want to say until about '62, and then she became ill, and I think she passed away sometime around that, the grandmother. After that, my mother ran it for 40 years, or more, at Toulouse Street. The Hove Perfume Company. Her name was Hovey-King, and so she [00:05:00] francophiled the

word "Hovey" into "Hove."

CAVE: Where did you go to high school?

YOKUM: Well, they kept asking me not to come back to many of them, but I went to De La Salle, and they asked me not to come back. Eventually, my parents sent me to reform school, St. Paul's in Covington. I was in the boarding school there. I managed to get through it.

CAVE: When did you find you had an interest in painting?

YOKUM: Well, I dabbled when I was a child. I would draw and make cartoons, but really didn't take it very seriously. I thought art is kind of weird, really. But after I graduated from high school, I went a year to business administration at USL in Lafayette, and found that that was not my calling. So I stayed out a year, saved up a bunch of money, and I went back to USL and majored in art, and got straight A's in everything but math, algebra, which was my undoing, and I couldn't bring my grades up. I did so well at that that my parents encouraged me, and I got some training, and then I went to New York for eight years and studied with a classical, old-school painter, a guy named Frank Mason, at the Art Students League there. It's an old school that -- you learn -- it's called the atelier method, where you just study with a guy that you like, and there's no grades or anything. You just show up and learn what you

can. It's one-on-one kind of stuff. It's beautiful.

CAVE: Talk a little bit more about him.

YOKUM: Freddy Mason?

CAVE: Why did you like his work so much?

YOKUM: Well, when I first went to the school, I was with contemporary kind of painters, and I fooled around. One day, I went up on the fourth floor and saw these beautiful paintings. He taught me how to make my own paint, and we used a Flemish medium from van Eyck in the 1400's. It is - - oh man. I wanted to learn how to draw and paint anything so that I could just paint my dreams, for instance, but then I became very involved in the anatomy and the proper way to -- tonal painting and classical approach to the light effect, and [oh this one?] lost and the found edge, you know, very important, very important. Then I didn't want to be a portrait painter, but I was always very good at doing portraits, and I made a lot of commissions like that. Then, in the past 8 to 10 years, I was coming here and getting archival images of the early jazz guys from the turn of the century, and making giant paintings out of them, and sold every one of them. So they were very popular.

CAVE: When you were a child, did you come down to the Quarter very often?

YOKUM: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, especially in early high school, oh my God, because there was nobody living at the house where the Hove was on Toulouse Street. So my friends, we took over the attic, and on the weekends it was -- oh, I was a very popular fellow. Like, "He's got a place in the Quarter! We can go hang out." It was a lot of fun. That's the -- I would say from about '62 on, and then I started living there after '66, the summer of '66.

CAVE: What are your earliest memories of the Quarter?

YOKUM: Well, of course, everybody laments the lack of -- it was such a neighborhood. It was an art colony. It was an honest-to-God art colony. All the square was very talented people out there. A lot of little shops, not just art shops, but little -- like the Acorn Shop, and these little boutiques, mom-and-pop things. There was a lot more people who lived down here, especially younger people in service industry. You could get an apartment, albeit a little rundown, but you could get a very inexpensive apartment, as opposed to now, that everything's kind of beyond the reach. They have to go to the exurbs to [00:10:00] get a decent place to live.

CAVE: When you were in high school, did you go to Bourbon Street?

YOKUM: Bourbon Street was never one of my -- but, oh, all the

rest of the Quarter was -- you know. There were my favorite barrooms and coffee houses. Just interesting places to go.

CAVE: Was there a restaurant that your parents liked to take you?

YOKUM: Well, there was Galatoire's, of course, but that was just for special occasions. When we lived uptown, we'd go to -- I don't know. I want to say [Langford's?] but it wasn't Langford's. There was uptown stuff, but not so much in the Quarter. Once I got older and I started going to -- Galatoire's was always my favorite (inaudible).

CAVE: What made you move back to New Orleans rather than stay in New York?

YOKUM: Well, I had come back for a summer after being up there for quite some time. I'd always come back in the summer, and traveled as much as I could. But I came back in, I don't know, '80-something, and met a girl, and I never quite moved back to New York. My sister had moved to come back to run the perfume shop, Hove, because she lived up in New York, and we were roommates for a number of years. So it was convenient like that. When I lost my domicile -- those New York streets are cold. I would have had to really go to art school. I don't know, it was -- it just seemed like a stretch. But then I would go back for a

month at a time after that, whenever I had money. No, I came back, fell in love with this girl, and never quite moved back.

CAVE: Did you move then into the address that you're at now?

YOKUM: Seven twenty three, yeah. I had already been living there since '66. We're talking 10, 12 years later. Two years at college, university, and many, many years studying every fall and -- whatever the two semesters are.

CAVE: Did you know many of the artists that were working in the Quarter in the mid-'60s?

YOKUM: Yes, yes. I started -- once I was involved, I was -- there was a little shop on Toulouse Street. Now it's the Glass Menagerie, the Magic Menagerie. It's right there, near the corner. There were three artists, and they took me under their wing. I loved these three guys. One of them is still with us, Dick -- his name's Dick. I don't know what his last name is. He does houses and stuff. Still around, still painting. But there were -- I went to John McCrady Art School for one summer.

CAVE: Oh, talk about that.

YOKUM: John had passed away, so it was his wife that ran it, and I didn't quite get along with her so well. I studied there for a couple of summers, and it was a good little art school. I don't know that the guy that does these --

what's his name? Anyway, Rolland Golden was particularly kind to me as a young artist, and he was very helpful to keep me inspired. He had a big gallery right there on Royal Street, across in the 600 block, 600 -- 500 block, in the five. Again, there was a lot of young people that had apartments all over the Quarter, so it was just such a neighborhood then. Now it's just kind of like I hardly even know my neighbors, except for you guys at the Historic Collection.

CAVE: Did you know Noel Rockmore?

YOKUM: Yes, I did. I knew him pretty well, pretty well. He didn't call or write. I would go to the Vaucresson restaurant, which was right around the corner from me on Bourbon Street, and Larry Bornstein would hang out there, and Noel would hang out there. I got to know those two characters, Larry Bornstein --

CAVE: What was he like? What was your take on Bornstein?

YOKUM: He was a curmudgeonly old guy. He rented originally from my parents at 824 Royal, which is where [00:15:00] I now -- my brother and I own that building now, 824 Royal. There's stories that he was running women out of the attic. There was this little old lady couple that owned the ground floor that ran the building for my parents, kind of watched it. They would claim that he was moving heavy boxes around

in the attic late at night, because he had all those pre-Columbian artifacts. He was quite a raconteur. Yeah, he lived at 824. I knew him real well. He took me under his wing. People like him, and Phil [Begay?] at French Quarter Realty, they --

CAVE: I don't know much --

YOKUM: For some reason -- he had French Quarter Realty. It was their old extension of it. Now it's different. Michael Wilkinson. When I first got the house in Toulouse in my name, I rented out the ground floor. Phil Begay was a gruff old guy, but he told people I was his hero, and I never knew why except that his son, who's a good friend of mine, Brian Begay, said it's because that he loved my lifestyle. He'd tell people I was his hero. It was really funny. I was very flattered by that, because this guy is a very sophisticated guy.

CAVE: What was your take on Rockmore?

YOKUM: Noel, on some days, was very warm and engaging, and then on another day, you'd think he wanted to spit on you. It was always kind of touchy with him. But we were friends, and we would talk. I'd been to his studio a couple of times. I was just a puppy artist, so I was thrilled to see what he did. The guy was like a cult hero. He did that famous painting that was in Johnny White's for

all those years. It was all the characters of the French Quarter at the time. Allan Jaffe, who I didn't know well - - but I know his son now -- that started Preservation Hall, I did a big painting of him with his Olympia Brass Band. Let's see. But Noel was such a -- he was, like I say, a cult kind of a figure. But Larry Bornstein would give him money and just take paintings. That's how Larry came up with all of these Noel Rockmores of the musicians. Many of them are still hanging at Preservation Hall today.

CAVE: Did you know any of the street musicians that were working at that time?

YOKUM: Let's see, street musicians. Not really, because it wasn't like it is now. They weren't allowed to play on the street. There would be some at Jackson Square, but really not much of that. That came much later, after, say, the late '80s, '90s, and now it's what it is now, where they're everywhere. Which isn't always bad, but it's not always good either. They're a little loud.

CAVE: Did you know Jon and Gypsy Lou Webb?

YOKUM: Yes, that was Noel's friend, Gypsy, isn't it? I did not know her, but we would nod. I mean, she knew I was a local, anyway. But no, I didn't know much about her. She was always over there.

CAVE: Did you know Bill Russell?

YOKUM: No. No, I don't think so. I know who he is now, but I didn't know him at that time.

CAVE: How did you approach your art at that time? Were you selling it on Jackson Square, or were you trying to get into galleries?

YOKUM: When I first came back from New York, I got a little permit and I set up on Jackson Square doing portraits. But one day I was out there, and my sister was sitting in for me, my shill, if you will. As I'm drawing this portrait of her, a huge pigeon doo covered her face. I packed up my stuff and I never went back. Well, you see, I was fortunate that I had my house with two north light skylights in the attic, so I had a nice studio. I just kind of went indoors. I've done a lot of landscapes, but I like -- I'm a -- people is what I like to draw and paint mostly. It worked out good.

CAVE: And talk about [00:20:00] your early work. Did you do primarily portraiture?

YOKUM: A lot of that. I worked conventions. The woman -- Naomi Marshall from Dixie Art Supplies, when it was here on Chartres Street, right down the street here, she would hire me for conventions and pay me whatever she paid me. But I would sit there and do, like, 50 charcoal portraits for all the people. They would just line up. It was great

training, great training. Let's see, what else would I do? I would do work on the square for quite a couple of years, not long after that. I got a lot of portrait commissions back in those days, from doctors and friends and -- yeah, so that kept me going for a long time.

CAVE: You mentioned that you knew somebody that thought you were their hero because of your lifestyle. Talk a little bit more about your lifestyle during those years. What did you do for fun?

YOKUM: Well, anything that I can say out loud, I'll try to remember for you. I was young and full of life, and I like girls a lot, so that kept me real busy. I would travel as often as possible. I was fairly, with a qualified, successful painter, because I just didn't quite work it out, the gallery. My teachers taught me how to paint, but nobody taught me how to sell a painting, and that's a whole other world of art, is creating art and then dealing with the commercial aspect of it. Unfortunately, for many years, I equated success with compromise, which can often be the truth. But no, I've disabused of that notion. I think you can do both now. I'm working on that. I've always been fortunate that people come into my studio -- excuse me -- people will come into my studio from New York or Chicago, and then they see something, they ask me how

much, and bam, I make a deal. I've had an awful lot of success. I paint what I want to paint, and then someday, somebody comes in and wants to buy it. It's just a -- it's really the best, the best.

CAVE: Talk about your 723 Toulouse Street address. Talk about the building and (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

YOKUM: Oh my God. Well, even as a very young kid, when I would visit my grandmother when she lived there in the, oh, I guess, '50s, as early as I can remember, we'd go and visit Lillian Hovey-King. This old house, just I was fascinated. I was sure there were secret passages and dungeons and things. I just like old stuff. I've never lived in a really modern house in my life. Born at 824 Royal. That's 1816 on some parts of it. Moved to an antebellum home on Prytania Street that was 1840s. Then I lived in this house on Toulouse Street, 1797. There's some -- 1807. Somewhere in there, it was built. The Historic Collection says 1807. My granddaddy put a plaque up there, a brass plaque, that says 1797. I'm sticking with him.

CAVE: Yeah?

YOKUM: Yeah. Damn the torpedoes.

CAVE: Did you do much work on the house? Renovate --

YOKUM: Very little. I mean, I keep a good roof on it, and I keep the termites out. No, I am loathe to do any real

renovations, because what the general opinion is, is that it's the best preserved house of that age, of any house in the French Quarter. Everything is original in there. So I don't even want to repaint. I've got a living room where the paint is peeling on the ceiling, and I had some wealthy patrons that had just bought a very expensive painting, and they were having a drink with me in my living room, and they looked up at the ceiling and said, "Pete, we're going to send our guy [00:25:00] over here to fix that ceiling." I said, "Oh, no, you're not." I said, "Hollywood pays double for that paint. They can't reproduce that on the set." Then, of course, at 723, from early on, I've had a lot of movies filmed there. Back in the '80s and early '90s, with all the videos. I must have had a hundred videos shot there by different -- "On Bended Knee" with Boyz II Men. Hundreds of them. Then *JFK* was filmed in my house for part of it. Joe Pesci was David Ferrie's character in the movie, and he lived in my house. There's a bunch of scenes in that. And numerous other ones. Then there was *Lolita* with Jeremy Irons and Dominique -- Dominique Swain is her name? They were there for almost a month and a half filming.

CAVE: What's it like seeing your house in a movie?

YOKUM: Well, it's always amazing to me that they want to

portray it on the rundown side, right? But in *Lolita*, they made it look beautiful, I mean really beautiful, but *JFK* was kind of a flophouse. In *The Mechanic* and a bunch of fairly recent movies, it was always the woman of easy assignations house, where the main character has an affair with some ill-repute woman. That's happened three or four times. It was always the slutty girl in the movie that lived in my house. On a typical weekend -- not typical, but not that rare, I'll have somebody call me up from New York and say, "Pete, I'm watching this movie. Was that your house in it?" and I say, "Yeah, man." "I thought that was your house." So it's funny. Then the *New York Times* did an article on me (inaudible) [a local?]. The title of the piece was "New Orleans: Where Noble Rot." And I took umbrage with the "rot," because there's no rot. Yes, it's not merry, it's not shiny, but there's no rot, damn it. Anyway, they really made it kind of like a *Streetcar Named Desire*, kind of shoddy, "noble rot." Anyway, it was fun. It was a big article.

CAVE: How does that work? How do you get them to give you money to film something in your house?

YOKUM: Well, they know what a perfect little slut I am for their Hollywood money. I'm sorry, but it's true. The way it works is, in each town or each big center, there's

locations people. So if Universal is going to come to New Orleans to do a film, they know who these locations people are, and they all call. So all the locations people in town, pretty much all of them, know my house, and they've got a dossier on me. They'll bring them by. It will be a trial run where they bring the director by, and if they're interested, then they'll come back with the art department guy. So two or three visits before they actually make up their mind and want to make a deal with me to film in my house. So it -- Nicolas Cage came three or four times when he was making this terrible movie, but he loved my house. Instead of filming in my house, he went and bought one down the street [on Esplanade?]. Bought his own darn house. But in the meantime, he saw one of my paintings and bought one of my [absinthe?] paintings from me. I don't know if it was a consolation or whether he really -- he kept asking me about it, and he said, "Well, do you sell your paintings?" I said, "Well, yes, I sell my paintings." So I was thrilled.

CAVE: Do you have much interaction with the actors and the directors?

YOKUM: Well, it depends on the actor. They're pretty busy, and some of them, like Tommy Lee Jones, didn't have time to -- he was in *JFK*. But Joe Pesci was happy to talk to me.

Kevin Bacon was also in *JFK*. He just sat [00:30:00] down. We talked for an hour. He just is the most approachable. People like Dr. John, when they were doing some shoots for an album he was making with some other people, right after Katrina, he sat down and he must have -- we talked for 45 minutes, just like we were old friends. There's that.

Mark Ruffalo, when he was doing this *Now You See Me*, he'd come down on break and jump into bed with me and my dog and my girl, and watch TV until -- he was the cutest guy, Mark Ruffalo. That was *Now You See Me*, the original one. They did quite a bit of shots in my house for that. There was *The Mechanic*. There was *Looper* with Bruce Willis. Poor Bruce Willis. He was so old and tired when he needed to go to the little boy's room, and they sent him down, and he passed up the bathroom, and he was in his little skivvies, with his little skinny legs. I didn't even introduce myself. I was -- I said, "No, you missed the bathroom. It's over there." But anyway, there's a lot of that, a lot of that. I've met so many -- so many of them.

CAVE: Do they call on you for help ever with the scenes; they need something that you might have in your house?

YOKUM: Well, yeah, yeah, they do, and of course, my job is to make sure they don't get carried away. I'm what they call site rep. I make them pay me, too, because sometimes

they'll film for 16 hours, a typical -- when they're filming, they'll go. They'll want to move this around, or they want to do this and do that. I'm amenable to almost anything, but leave the antiques. Don't mess up my antiques, or gouge my floor, or anything outrageous. But they're usually -- 99% of the time, they're extremely respectful. I had a big fight with the guy that was making *Lolita*. The scene was Dominique Swain at my marble table that's just the way I have it set up. They used it in the shot. The scene was she was arguing with Jeremy Irons. It was in the -- and she get up and throw the chair. This beautiful old chair that -- and after about the fifth take, I just had it. I said, "No, you can't do that anymore." (inaudible) But that was the only time I had to really get serious with them. But yeah, it was little things like that.

CAVE: Talk about how the Quarter has changed, or at least your part of the Quarter, over the decades, and the development of the tourist economy.

YOKUM: Imagine that -- it's always been a destination for tourists, but in the old days, it wasn't this college, rah-rah attitude that now it's just get drunk, and Mardi Gras beads, and show us your breasts. I mean, yeah, Bourbon Street was strip clubs, but there was a lot of music

venues, and they weren't -- they were burlesque. It was at least better than what you get now, with Rick's and all of these -- Penthouse. They're just trashy now. Of course, for a number of years, I had a lot of trouble with the barrooms on Bourbon Street that were allowed to just make as much noise as they wanted to. I had to take them to court. Find a lawyer. It was a battle royale for about 10 years.

CAVE: When did that all start?

YOKUM: Well, it started -- like I say, when I first moved in -- we're going back to what it was like in the beginning. It was more of an art colony. It was more of a neighborhood. And yeah, there was Bourbon Street, but it was a little more civilized, if you want to stretch a term. You want to really stretch the word "civilized." It was little burlesque strip shows. I'm sure there was b-drinking and all of the other attendant dalliances, but mostly it was very quiet. They had barkers. If young people were walking by, they'd shut the door. If it was a young gentleman, they'd open the door. It had some sense of -- [00:35:00] a little more than what it is now. And not to say that there's anything wrong with that, but I eschew Bourbon Street. If I don't have to, I go any other way I can.

CAVE: What prompted you into action over the noise issue?

YOKUM: Well, particularly where I live. I'm on the Coney Island end of the French Quarter, Toulouse Street. There was no political will to get these nightclubs, these bands, to minimize their noise. They had speakers that project out into the street, all illegal. But there was no political will to do anything about it. I began -- I don't know, what was it? It was before Katrina. Well before Katrina. These bands would play until three or four o'clock every morning. They'd start at 11:00. With the improvement of stereo -- the subwoofer was my real downfall. It's this thing that amplifies the bass, you know? It was shooting through my house almost constantly. And you can't get away from it. It goes through solid brick. I would ask them, please, and they'd just laugh at me. Then I found this guy, Stuart Smith, who took me on. He put the full strength of his law firm. They're very respectful now, but I still have three lawsuits with Pat O'Briens, Court of Two Sisters -- (whispers) I always say "shysters" -- and Old Opera House. But they have, all three, begun to be much better neighbors. The unfortunate thing is my location, is that from the front part of my house, I get the noise from Bourbon Street. In the back of my house, I have Pat O'Briens and Court of Two Sisters,

back to back. Court of Two Sisters would have a band from 9:30 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon. This trumpet player would sit there and blast me. So there was that at 9:30. Then there was Pat O'Briens that would play their loudspeakers in their patio until all hours of the night. And then Bourbon Street. So it was a non-stop -- it was almost 24/7. Maybe about four or five o'clock in the morning, until around 9:30, I'd get some peace and quiet. So it was a point where I couldn't live in my house. I could have sold it and moved to Missouri, but I just decided that I wasn't going to let this happen to me. Dear God, I was lucky enough to find a law firm to take me on, because it's the kind of battle that any -- even a very wealthy person, the lawyers would tell them, "Well, you know, you're looking at a 10-year grind, and it's going to be this many millions of dollars." Because that's what lawyers do, is they just throw paper at each other. Well, we don't have to talk ill of the lawyers, because there's good ones and bad ones.

CAVE: Did you know Tennessee Williams?

YOKUM: No, I did not. I would see him quite a few times. He would stay at the Maison de Ville, which was right next door to me, but that was much later in life. We never really spoke. I might have said hello to him. Yeah, he

would stay there quite a bit at Maison de Ville.

CAVE: Did you know Pete Fountain?

YOKUM: Yes, I knew him pretty well. I mean, we didn't hang out, but I was on a couple of shoots with him as an assistant to a photographer. One time, I was part of the talent. We would hang out. He was just the most delightful fellow. Just delightful. He'd tell stories and jokes, all of a very risque nature. Oh, I loved him. I really do.

CAVE: Do you remember the UpStairs Lounge fire?

YOKUM: Oh, was that the gay bar that was down there? I remember when it happened, yes. It wasn't one of my hangouts, but -- [00:40:00] no, I do remember that. It was tragic, tragic.

CAVE: Talk a little bit about crime as an issue in the Quarter.

YOKUM: I don't know. It's never fallen on me, but of course, it has gotten a lot more common. But back in the old days, maybe there'd be a mugging or two, but it wasn't -- there was no guns. I think there was a lot of drunk sailors that might have gone home with a transvestite and been very disillusioned the next day. It's like, "Oh my God, I think I'm queer. The best sex I ever had in my life." I'm sure that happened a lot. I remember the My-O-My Club. That

was out by the lake, but for a while, I think it was down here. There was some -- in the early days, there was Gino's Back Room, which was this great barroom on Bourbon Street. It was up -- and there was Lucky Pierre's, which was the most wonderful barroom in the world. It would stay open all night long. Down in the -- I want to say 800 block of Bourbon Street. There was a piano bar in the front. There was a tented patio area that was a restaurant, and open all night long and then there was ladies of easy assignation available for the patrons there in little rooms upstairs. It was a real French Quarter hangout. Just a wonderful -- of course, there was Johnny White's back then. I had my hair -- I grew my hair long. There was one hippie bar called The Seven Seas, and that was on St. Philip, right by Decatur.

CAVE: Talk about The Seven Seas.

YOKUM: The Seven Seas. This was when they'd never seen long-haired boys. They wanted to kill me. They'd whistle at me. I'd say, "What is your problem?" But it was the hip part. It was underground. Nothing fancy about it, but that's where all the young counter-culture people, like myself (inaudible). It was a great bar. It lasted for a number of years. But now it's just called Mississippi River Bottom. It's all right. But I don't go there

anymore. Then there was Napoleon's Retreat on Decatur Street, and there was -- of course, Napoleon House has always been one of my great hangouts, even when I was real young. That was a great place to go. I went to school with one of the owners, Sal Impastato. He was a boarder at St. Paul's, and I knew him since sophomore year of high school. What else was there? There was Cafe Maspero's that was on the corner of Chartres and St. Louis. Now it's -- I don't know, is it called Maspero? No. It's something. Anyway, there's still a bar there, but this was run by a guy named Charlie. Now he has Maspero's on Toulouse and Decatur. But he's since retired. His kids run it. Anyway, my girlfriend was a waitress there at Cafe Maspero's, and it was a great hangout. Oh, man. He was a sweet, wonderful little fellow. Then there was Johnny White's, that's still in business, only they're selling jewelry now. Little po' boys used to be what -- poor people. Now they're \$14, \$15 a sandwich. It's like, oh my God. So the tourists love it. What else was there? For a while, there was these very unique little clubs on Decatur Street, but further down, towards Esplanade. This is before Frenchmen Street was ever big. There was one club, it was called the French Quarter Convexity Number One, and it was a real beatnik place. You'd go in and they had

bongos. It wasn't a bar; it was just kind of like a scene, a happening. This is back when we were (inaudible). It was quite a scene. French Quarter Convexity Number One.

[00:45:00] It was very obscure, and I thought, oh man, this is it, this is [cool here?]. Then there was Jules Tavern, before it became what it is now. It was this dive that was just always happening. Oh, leave us not forget La Casa De Los Marineros, that is now where Cafe Maspero's is. It was a barroom, but it was three barrooms, all linked together. The first one was the American bar, the second bar was Spanish, and the third was Greek. So as you got deeper and deeper into these three different bars -- it was the most unique, wonderful restaurant -- I mean, it wasn't a restaurant, it was just a bar. But man, was it -- it was rough, but I used to like to go in there. The Greeks from down the street would come and battle with the Spanish sailors. It was always a scene, man. La Casa De Los Marineros. That's been gone a long time. All right.

CAVE: Talk about some of the people you painted.

YOKUM: Well, let's see. About a year and a half ago, I painted the crown prince of Ethiopia, and he liked his painting so well he knighted me. Yes, yes, you might refer to me as "Sir Peterson Moon Yokum, Knight Commander of Ethiopia."

CAVE: How did you happen to meet him?

YOKUM: One of his -- I'm looking for the word --

representatives was a good friend of mine that knew me. He lives in Tampa, but the prince lived in Virginia. Anyway, he worked for the prince, and Ermias Selassie -- Haile Selassie was his name. His grandfather was Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, the emperor. He was coming to town, and my friend recommended that he get in touch with me, the prince, and he did, and we had -- my girl and I, Polly, Polly and I had a party for him with our butler. We had the butler. He was such an engaging, charming fellow that I -- he saw my paintings and asked me to do a portrait of him, which I willingly obliged. It took a year and a half for me to finish it, because I was working on some big jazz paintings. We had a big unveiling, and he knighted me that night. It was really wonderful.

CAVE: Did you paint many sort of local people?

YOKUM: Well, yes, lots of doctors and lawyers over the years. I'm trying to think, anybody that would really stand out that... No. No, just the prince, and lots of -- and friends and recommendations. I would get it through word of mouth, usually.

CAVE: How did you and Polly meet?

YOKUM: She was dancing for the Delta Festival Ballet here in

town, and friends of mine that knew her -- she was on a hiatus, and I was looking for models. So she came and I hired her as my model. Then we fell in love, and she never left. Sort of. A synopsis.

CAVE: What kinds of things do you guys do together in the Quarter?

YOKUM: Well, there's all the restaurants, [Galatoire's?] (inaudible) and little boutiques, and then smaller restaurants. We walk our dog and just go around. Just all the things you do in your neighborhood. There's no place where I -- when I was younger and had my guns on, so to speak, I would hang out at bars, but I like to spend time at home now.

CAVE: Do you do cooking a lot at home?

YOKUM: Oh, my girl, Polly, she's an excellent cook.

CAVE: Where do you all go grocery shopping, or where have you --

YOKUM: Rouses, and then if we actually [00:50:00] leave the Quarter, which we are loathe to do, we go to Whole Foods or some of the bigger ones. Rouses is right there, St. Peter and Royal.

CAVE: Had you ever thought about leaving the French Quarter?

YOKUM: What?

CAVE: Have you ever thought about leaving the French Quarter?

YOKUM: Oh, no. No. Only during that period where I was having so much trouble with my neighbors, where I actually -- Polly's mom had a condo at Diamondhead, and she had had some health problems, Polly did, so we were actually living there four or five days a week, and I'd come into town. That was for a couple years. That was during the height of this. I've never been so depressed in my life. It was like they were stealing my dream life, man. It's so much better now, thanks to Stuart Smith and Smith Stag Law Firm.

CAVE: Talk about friendships in the Quarter. I lived in the Quarter for a while, and it seems like people come and go. Have you had long-term friends that have lived in the Quarter?

YOKUM: I've lived there longer than anybody else I know, tell you the truth. Most of my friends lived elsewhere, but they would always -- living in the French Quarter, New Year's, Mardi Gras, what else? Fourth of July. I got very popular for these events. Everybody -- and the beautiful thing is that any time my friends would be in the Quarter for various reasons, they'd always call, and they'd want to show their friends my house and come by. It was always a destination. There wasn't that many of my close friends that I can even think of. There was a few, but most of them lived uptown and Garden District and around the park.

CAVE: Talk about being a neighbor of the Historic New Orleans Collection.

YOKUM: The best neighbors on earth. Are you kidding me? They're very quiet. They're very, very quiet. We love the Historic Collection. All of my friends, the little ladies that work for you guys, Ms. Joan and Ms. Geneva, and Mr. Johnny -- oh, man, they love me. We're real good friends. Then all the ladies -- back in the late '80s, I was using my front room as -- when I'd do my nudes. I would do paintings with my nude models. Well, apparently there was a group of ladies that worked on the second floor at 722, across the street -- no -- 722 -- where they would see the goings-on. There was quite a bit of -- I wasn't even aware that they were watching. You know, naked girls walking around. But it ended up being -- the story was I was naked, and the model was clothed. I don't know how that happened. That was one of the stories that got back. That could have happened. It's not out of the possibility realm.

CAVE: Do you remember Kemper Williams at all?

YOKUM: Yes, I do. I remember him real well. He was very sweet to me. I would just be -- when I was visiting my grandmother. He had passed away by, oh, I don't know, '66. I think he was already -- but early on, his chauffeur and

his Rolls-Royce would pull up and park in that 722, and he'd get out and talk to us, and we were fascinated with him. But we really didn't know who he was. He was just like this old guy that had a chauffeur and drove around a - - and on the very corner there of Toulouse and -- and his wife, I don't remember ever talking to her, but he was a sweetheart, the colonel. I was pretty young, and he was just, I think, being polite. I can't remember what we ever discussed. But there was a [Como's?] Lounge that was on the corner of Toulouse and Royal, on the Esplanade/Rampart side of the block. There was an old man, Mr. Como. I'd go down there, and he had Coca-Colas and soft drinks. But it was a lounge. It was this kind of New Orleans -- not a dive, it was just kind of like an air-conditioned lounge there for many years. There was my artist friends that had a shop just behind that. Let's see, [00:55:00] what else was -- oh, there was -- across the street, there was a photography studio that is now the art shop that Brian Begay and his brother owned the building that's right next to you guys. Well, not next to you. It's on the corner. It's on the Canal/Rampart corner of Toulouse and Royal. That was Da Silva. It was a photography studio. That's way back. Behind her lived this wonderful lady, Phyllis, Ms. Phyllis, and she was good friends with Johnny

[Darnell?]. That was the photographer, who was a very good friend of mine, and very many times I would -- he'd call me up and we'd hang out on his porch, and see his photographs, and talk about art and life. He was a good friend of mine, Johnny Darnell. He was right there in that 600 block of Royal on Decatur side.

CAVE: Is there still that element of an art colony in the Quarter?

YOKUM: Very little, man. I just don't see much of it at all. Whatever that stuff is they're selling as art on the square, I don't know -- I don't mean to denigrate, but I don't see a lot of -- I mean, when I was out there, there were some really talented artists doing portraits, beautiful portraits. Now they just -- it's kind of some jazz guy, and they'll do 50 of them, and they're different colors. But yeah. No, no, no. It wasn't just an art colony in the sense of art shops, but it was where a lot of artists lived and could afford. It was the right milieu for inspiration. What people may or may not realize when they come to the French Quarter, especially Americans, is the scale of the buildings is proportional to a human being rather than some giant building where you're just an ant. So people walk down the street. Thank God, with the (inaudible) Commission, although it's lost its teeth,

they've kept -- a lot of the charm is still in the old French Quarter buildings. So there's that. It's not completely gone, but it's been diluted tremendously.

CAVE: Do you ever think about how strange it is that you kind of live in the same buildings and the same neighborhood that your ancestors lived in hundreds of years ago?

YOKUM: I just read a book by a woman that had taught at LSU, and it was called *The Baratarians*. Her name -- I can't remember her name just now, but it was the site of the Battle of 1812, of how the Baratarians, Jean Lafitte and Dominique You, and how instrumental -- when I read history like that, it just -- then I walk around the Quarter. Yeah, yeah, there's that, there's a lot of that.

CAVE: Are you interested in your family's history?

YOKUM: Yeah. Oh, yeah. I mean, because on my daddy's momma's side, the French, the old French family, the [Villeries?], and I've got so many French relatives that had plantations up and down the Mississippi River. There was that messy little war in the 1800's, and then the Depression finished everybody off. If things had gone different, I could have been a man of substance here. I had some good relatives. Actually, I'm not entirely sure, but part of this book I'm reading about the Baratarians is, when the British came up through Lake Borgne and came up the bayou, the first

plantation that they took over was the Villerie plantation, and he was one of my relatives on my daddy's momma's French side, the de Fazende. That's history. That's living history. I had many relatives that fought in Chalmette for the Battle of New Orleans. My daddy was in the Society of the Battle of 1812. Yeah. So I've got [01:00:00] a lot of -- I've got roots, man, I've got roots.

CAVE: Do you think you'll just remain here in the Quarter and do your painting? Is that your plan?

YOKUM: Until I -- like Charlton Heston -- my cold, dead hands, I'll be at this house. I can't imagine what would get me to go and live anywhere else in the world. I love it.

CAVE: I don't have any more questions. Is there any part of your French Quarter experience that we didn't talk about that (inaudible)?

YOKUM: Well, what I hope to see in my passing, that I have -- I have a daughter, and I have a niece and a nephew. I'd like to make sure that people live in a house like mine, because it was always a single-family dwelling. It wasn't a grand mansion for -- there was no slave-owning kind of thing. It was a merchant that built this house, and overbuilt it, in 1807, if you people want to stick to that. That's why Hollywood loves me -- my house so much, because you can't reproduce the authentic. It's the original

floors, the original batten shutters and window panes. Some of the hand-rolled window panes. Not many, but there's still -- so that -- I don't like that they over-renovate some of these beautiful old houses, just because it's a little dinged up. There's far too much of that going on. They'll lower a ceiling and put in air conditioning rather than keep a 14-foot ceiling. If the plaster falls, they put sheetrock, which is one of my favorite things to have, sheetrock. It's nasty stuff. Anyway, there's a lot of it. So I just want to see that -- I'm hoping that my people that inherit my house will appreciate it and kind of -- they call it museum-like because of the way I've kept it. If a little plaster falls, I'm not worried about that. I kind of like it. It's authentically distressed. It's like a good antique, and I've got lots of antiques from my grandparents and my parents. When I was a kid, I would have loved to have Danish modern, but now I say, thank God they didn't listen to me. These are good, because they just get better with time, a good antique. Now I'm becoming an antique, so I'm hoping the rabbit-skin glue will keep me together. The old kind of formula. No, I just want to see that people realize what a gem the French Quarter is, and not over-swank it up. Just let it be authentic.

CAVE: Great. That's a perfect place to end. Thank you.

YOKUM: All right.

END OF AUDIO FILE