

## Interview with Moses Battle

**Kathy Hersh:** We are now recording in the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs. We're talking to Moses Battle.

**Moses Battle:** Battle, B-A-T-T-L-E.

**Interviewer:** Oh, Battle, as in Battle Creek, Michigan.

**Battle:** As you wanna battle me?

**Interviewer:** Today is the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, and my name is Kathy Hersh. I'm the interviewer. We're at Joe's Stone Crab takeout restaurant. Tell us, were you a Miami native? Were you born here?

**Battle:** No, I was born in Georgia. Matter of fact, I was born in the same little small town that Bones was born in.

**Interviewer:** Where was that?

**Battle:** Fort Gaines. That's the closest town, but the area that we was born in, we call it Cotton Hill.

**Interviewer:** What brought your family here?

**Battle:** My brother, he came here first. He was first here. He came back and forth to Georgia. Matter of fact, I was in the service a couple years; a little tour of service. We met in Georgia, and he was telling me about Miami. The rest is history.

**Interviewer:** It sounded good to you.

**Battle:** I had been in Germany for a little tour of duty for a couple of years, and it was cold over there, all the time, Miami sounded warm, so let me go thaw out a little bit. I came down with him, and, as they say, I drunk the water, and I've been here ever since.

**Interviewer:** When did you start working at Joe's?

**Battle:** 1977. October 1977. I don't know the exact date, but I know it was in October, cuz it's ... You know, like it was-

**Interviewer:** Because that's the season, when the season starts.



**Battle:** Yeah, right. Yes, ma'am.

**Interviewer:** How old were you then?

**Battle:** 27-28? Maybe ... 28, 27 ... I was young; younger.

**Interviewer:** Were you on your own, or did you have a family?

**Battle:** I was on my own. On my own. Me, and my brother, he lived here. I had cousins here, but I was basically on my own.

**Interviewer:** How did you get the job here?

**Battle:** He worked here—

**Interviewer:** Your brother.

**Battle:** My brother, he worked here at Joe's, and he brought me over, introduced me to Calvin. "You wanna job?" I said, "Yes, sir."

**Interviewer:** Where did you start?

**Battle:** In the kitchen.

**Interviewer:** What were you doing?

**Battle:** I was catchin' dishes, catchin' dishes—

**Interviewer:** Catching dishes?

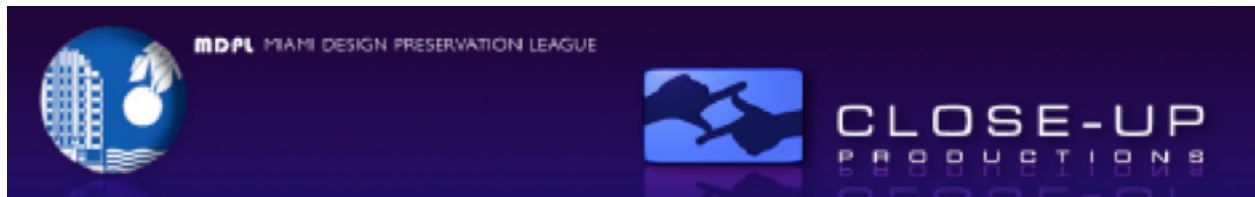
**Battle:** Catching, because as the machine rolled around on the dishwasher—

**Interviewer:** It sounds pretty exciting, catching dishes.

**Battle:** Yeah. No, that's what we call it, catchin' dishes. As the machine's rolling, you take the plates off, and another guy come by, load 'em up, straight out the kitchen.

**Interviewer:** It sounds a little hectic.

**Battle:** There wasn't that many people that were ... Maybe one. It was maybe like 10-12 people that worked the whole kitchen. It wasn't that many, then, because—



**Interviewer:** Was it all Black people working in the kitchen?

**Battle:** All Black, back then, yes. We had one Haitian, but he's Black, too, huh? Right, yeah ...

**Interviewer:** Did you have an ID?

**Battle:** I had to get a police card.

**Interviewer:** Tell us about that.

**Battle:** I had to go get police ... In order to work on the Beach, during those days, I was told that I needed a beach card. I said, "For what?" They say, "You just need a beach card to let 'em know that you work here at Joe's Stone Crab." Used to be a police station across the street, over here, about a block away. I think it was like \$5 for it. I went and got it. I just got outta the service, serving this country, and I've come to this place, here, and they said, "Well, you need a card to come here, to show that you work over here, you're working at Joe's Stone Crab." I'm finally like kinda familiar. Not famil—I don't know the word to say, but it was strange. It was strange.

**Interviewer:** You felt like why should you have to have it?

**Battle:** Right. I'm in America, right? I shouldn't need a card. I just served my country. You know what, I need a card for ...

**Interviewer:** You had to have it.

**Battle:** Had to have it to work.

**Interviewer:** Where were you living at the time?

**Battle:** I was living Overtown. If you was basically like Overtown, it was like the little Black community.

**Interviewer:** You took that jitney, or that bus?

**Battle:** They had cut the jitney out when I had started. I think he started in '69 or '71, and I started in '77, so they had cut that jitney out, then. Overtown, there was a bunch of guys that worked at Joe's, so we just met in the area, and we just came on—



**Interviewer:** Somebody had a car?

**Battle:** Somebody had a car.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so you carpooled—

**Battle:** Basically, it was, back in those days, yes, ma'am.

**Interviewer:** If you worked late—

**Battle:** Basically, everybody got off at the same time. I guess they waited on you, cuz we didn't have a ride, you know? We didn't have a ride, so we [crosstalk 05:21]

**Interviewer:** If you were seen driving in the car, after 11:00, would the police stop you?

**Battle:** No, they wouldn't stop me, unless you did something, like ran a stop sign, or something, but basically they—

**Interviewer:** With the police station so near, they probably knew who the people that worked here were.

**Battle:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** You didn't have a problem there.

**Battle:** I didn't have a problem. I didn't have a problem back then.

**Interviewer:** When you told people that you worked at Joe's, did it provide you a certain status, then, or was it just a job?

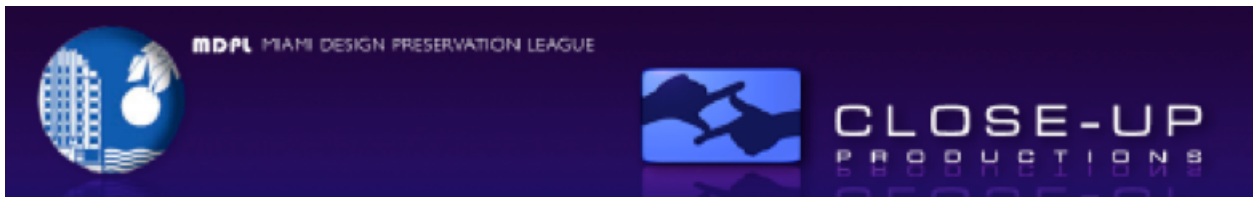
**Battle:** I don't ...

**Interviewer:** Like people Overtown, where you work?

**Battle:** Oh, yeah. "You work at Joe's? Bring me some crab! Let me hold a couple dollars," cuz they know we get paid every week, or whatever. They would come, like, "Yeah, you work at Joe's?" They knew that it was a good thing.

**Interviewer:** Everybody knew Joe?

**Battle:** Everybody knew Joe. I remember there was this guy, he used to tell me



stories years ago, like sometime, they be short in the kitchen, and Mr. Wise, he used to go with Tom, and get people, and say, “Who wanna work? Who wanna work?” He’d bring ‘em back across.

**Interviewer:** For times when they were short [crosstalk 07:00] so, just temporarily.

**Battle:** Yeah, just temporary, cuz they just needed some people. “Here, go over there, and get ‘em.”

**Interviewer:** A short drive—

**Battle:** Right. Come on back over. He was a good dude. He was a very, very, very good dude, Mr. Wise.

**Interviewer:** The owners treated you well?

**Battle:** Treated me very well; very, very well. [Inaudible 07:25] a story once, Mr. Wise, he used to call me Slim. He told me, said ... I guess I wasn’t moving ... When I was bussing tables, outside, I wasn’t moving fast enough. He walked up there, and said something. I don’t know what I said back to him, but it wasn’t the correct thing to say, cuz he told his daughter, Jo, and his son-in-law [inaudible 07:49] and they called me in the office the next day. Said, “Moses, you’re a good worker.” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well, you know, Pop, he’s getting old. You gotta respect him.” I said, “Yes, okay.” “It’s Joe’s way or the highway.” I said, “Okay, no problem.” No problem, since. I’ve been working here 41 years; just that little one incident. You know, you’re young. Not used to people talking to you a certain way. I should just let it rest.

**Interviewer:** You worked that out.

**Battle:** Oh, yeah, we worked it out. Matter of fact, he came back to me, and gave me \$5 the next day.

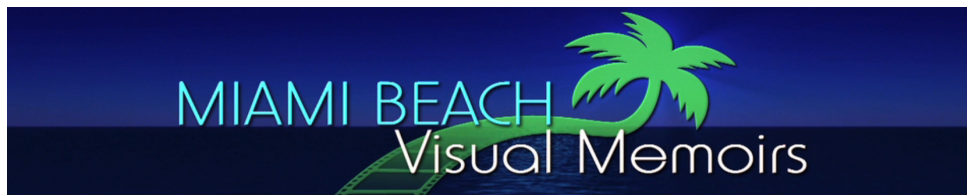
**Interviewer:** He sounds like a character.

**Battle:** He gave me \$5 ...

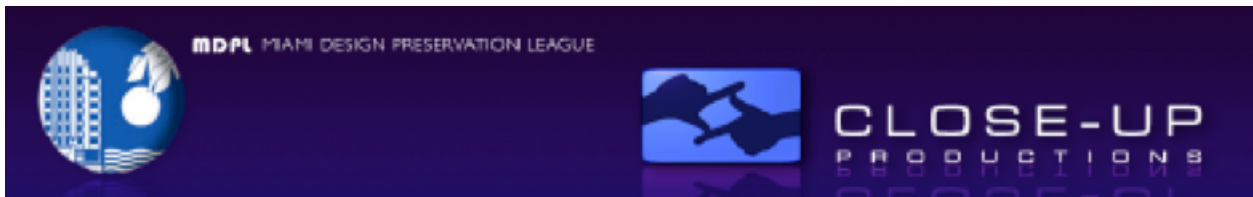
**Interviewer:** What did he say, when he—

**Battle:** No, he just gave me ... “Here, Slim ...” he gave me \$5.

**Interviewer:** He called you Slim.



- Battle:** Right. He gave me \$5, cuz it was just confrontation, in the heat of the moment. He was trying to get a table turned; get people in the seats, and I'm working crazy, and stuff ...
- Interviewer:** A lotta people would've said, "Hit the road."
- Battle:** Yes, they woulda, but, I guess, thank God, he didn't, cuz I was ... I was working hard. They knew I was working hard. We just ... Like my mom used to say, "One of those things." One of those things.
- Interviewer:** What kinda changes did you notice ... Did you eventually get ... You're a waiter, now.
- Battle:** Yes. Well, I—
- Interviewer:** How did that switch happen?
- Battle:** What happened was, I think it was like '93-'94. I was talking, me and him ... Like I said, he's my cousin, and we was just talking. He said, "Cuz, I'm fixin' to move on." I said, "You leaving Joe?" He said, "No, I'm fixin' to move into another spot." He said, "You wanna come with me?" He said, "I'm gonna be a captain." I said, "Yeah." He said, "You need to go talk to JoAnne, and tell her you wanna move on, move up." I did, and she said it was a great idea, and she—
- Interviewer:** It was your cousin, Bones, who encouraged you—
- Battle:** To move—
- Interviewer:** He was the first Black waiter on the floor.
- Battle:** Exactly. He was the first Black Captain.
- Interviewer:** Okay, captain is—
- Battle:** Seating captain. He was—
- Interviewer:** They have more rank than waiters?
- Battle:** Yes, well ... Yes, they do. They tell us basically what to do, and how to do it.
- Interviewer:** Then, it became visible to people working in the kitchen that if you



worked hard, you could move up.

**Battle:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** Did that have an effect on the morale?

**Battle:** No. They was happy for him, because they never seen nothing like ... They ain't never seen something like that happen to somebody started here, and now you're out there.

**Interviewer:** That encouraged people.

**Battle:** A lotta people, yes.

**Interviewer:** Tell us more about ... We've heard how Jesse Wise looked out for people who were employed here. Do you have any other examples?

**Battle:** When we'd be busy, in the middle of serving 50-60 to 100 people, and behind the stove, the cooks, the morale ... The guy's cutting crabs might be a little low, so he had a thing he would go into the liquor room, and he'd get a bottle of scotch, or whatever the people ... Gin, or something like that. He'd set it down. "Everybody get a drink." That picks up the morale. He had, I would say, like a vision to see how people was doing, and try to help ... There wasn't drinking allowed ... I don't know if his daughter, Miss JoAnne knew about it, but the manager, he knew it. Captain [inaudible 12:17], he knew about it. He went, "Get the guys a drink ..."

**Interviewer:** It sounds like it was a way of acknowledging—

**Battle:** That you're working hard. That you're working hard. You're working hard—

**Interviewer:** And that you're part of the success of the operation.

**Battle:** Yeah. You're working very hard.

**Interviewer:** How did they find the cooks? Did they have to do a cook test?

**Battle:** Mainly, the cooks was here when I got here, and they was like old-timers. They had been here, I'd say, 30 or 40 years before I got here. They was here when I got here, and when I became a waiter, they really helped me along, told me, "Order this way. Do this thing this way," and they really looked out for me. Captain [inaudible 13:10] he





helped me a whole lot; a whole lot, he did.

**Interviewer:** We've heard that they gave out loans to people, when they needed them.

**Battle:** I come over here a lotta summers ... You only have so much, you know what I'm saying? There's unemployment, something like that ... You get down to the last of the summer, like August, or September, you need the help over the hump, there, just to make it back to Joe's, so you could start at work. I'd come over and see the kitchen manager, see Calvin. "I need me some money, sir." 500, or 1,000, whatever it was. No questions asked. Go over there, and—

**Interviewer:** That encourages loyalty, doesn't it?

**Battle:** He knew that ... He had to take a chance that he might not come back, but—

**Interviewer:** Who's he?

**Battle:** The person, like me, that borrowed the money. He'd say, "Well, I know he's coming back."

**Interviewer:** There was trust.

**Battle:** There was trust. He didn't have to do it. I'd had to sign—

**Interviewer:** This was Jesse, or Calvin?

**Battle:** Calvin. You didn't have to sign nothing, saying—

**Interviewer:** The family trusted Calvin--

**Battle:** Calvin, exactly.

**Interviewer:** -to be the judge of that?

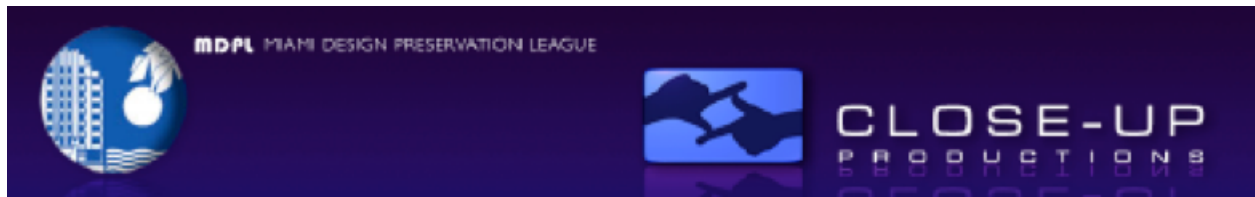
**Battle:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** Calvin was Black.

**Battle:** Yes, ma'am.

**Interviewer:** They put a lotta trust in him, it sounds like.





**Battle:** Calvin worked here over 51 years. I think he started ... Matter of fact, he started out as a busser, and I think in I think it was the '50s, or the late/early '60s. Then, he moved to the ... They hired him to be the kitchen manager. He had a good feel for people. He was from [inaudible 15:05] Florida. This is north Florida, and we was from ... Like I said, we was from Georgia. We in the same area, so he knew ... He knew people. He knew people.

**Interviewer:** What do you think is Joe's Stone Crab legacy for this community, in the broadest sense of the word?

**Battle:** What's their legacy? To give. To give to the community, to people. Give people a chance.

**Interviewer:** Any stories you wanna share with us?

**Battle:** [laughing]

**Male:** I want that story about Jesse, and caging the money off the tables. Oh, c'mon.

**Battle:** He was a wise ... His daughter probably told you that he was a big gambler. He needed money to gamble with, so he'll go 'round. He'll see these tables. He wasn't [inaudible 16:24] on credit cards, back then, like in the day. It was cash. Everything was cash. He'll walk around. He'll see a table that's got cash on it, and he'll pick it up. He didn't even count the money, just pick it up, put it in his pocket, and go to the cashier stand, and write "Comp," meaning that house gonna take care of the bill, while he got the money. He was a character, you know. They knew he was doing it, and what he was doing it for ... I think they clipped his wings. I don't know how they clipped his wings, but ...

**Interviewer:** The dog track was down the street.

**Battle:** No, right across the street. Right across the street. Sometimes, when he'd disappear, he over to the dog track, gambling. He was at the dog track, gambling. Then, him, and the kitchen manager, which his name ... We was talking about Calvin ... They used to play poker all nights, all time 'a night.

**Interviewer:** With the dog track across the street, did you get a lotta clientele from—

**Battle:** Oh, yeah. A lotta people come over there. Come for [inaudible 17:33]



**Interviewer:** A lotta gamblers.

**Battle:** A lotta gamblers. A lotta gamblers, you know? It was busy back in them days. The traffic was so bad. It's bad now, but not like back then.

**Interviewer:** When the dog track was—

**Battle:** With the dog track.

**Interviewer:** It attracted people from all over.

**Battle:** All over. Coming from Broward, and all over.

**Interviewer:** They would come here to eat.

**Battle:** Some coming to eat, then go to the dog track. Come from the dog track, to eat. We used to get our monies together. We'd get a race book before they start racing, and we will ... Me, and some of the guys, we'd get the money together, and we would bet. Then we'd send the guy over to bet for us. Hopefully, he'll come back with cash.

**Interviewer:** That must've been a temptation, if you got tips and stuff, and you had a dog track across the street.

**Battle:** Oh, yeah. That was, like they say, the good ol' days. That was the good ol' days.

**Interviewer:** As a waiter, do you recall waiting on any VIPs, or anybody special? We heard that Mohammad Ali used to come here.

**Battle:** Oh, he was the greatest. He was the greatest. Once, I nearly waited on him, but I had a conversation with him. He would be sitting at the table, there, and when celebrities, or VIP people come in, they don't want you to go to the table. Just leave 'em alone. It was someone over at your table, talking to him ... I don't know who it was, but they was told to get away from that table. He said, "No, no, no. These people made me. Send 'em all. Send 'em all. They want a autograph, I sign it." Another person like that was President Clinton. He walked through the kitchen—

**Interviewer:** President Clinton?

**Battle:** Yes. He walked through the kitchen, taking pictures with everybody. He's like down to earth. "C'mon. C'mon ..." I waited on Rosie



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O'Donnell. I think she had ... I don't know who she had with her. I'm trying ... I wanna say Madonna, but I don't know. She's a very nice lady. A lot of football players, entertainers. Jason Till. He played with the Dolphins, and stuff like that. Every section I worked, it's in the garden; we call it the garden. They try to sit [inaudible 20:23] but in the main dining room; that's where they try to ... Most people like to sit out there, so they can be seen.