

Morgan Rice

Where: Helvetia Community Hall

Date: April 30, 2016

Location: Helvetia, West Virginia

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

Length: 25:40

Project: Helvetia

Morgan Rice was born in Helvetia, West Virginia in 1999. She is the daughter of Hutte cook Henry Rice, and great-granddaughter of town matriarch and co-founder of the Hutte restaurant, Eleanor Mailloux. Ms. Rice is a member of the Helvetia Farm Women's Club and works part-time as a waitress at the Hutte restaurant. In 2015 she created a petition to save Helvetia's Ramp Supper.

This interview is part of a series of interviews conducted with foodways practitioners in Helvetia, West Virginia, as part of the Helvetia Foodways Oral History Project in partnership with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Learn more: <https://www.southernfoodways.org/oral-history/helvetia-west-virginia/>

Transcriber's Note: EH: Emily Hilliard, MR: Morgan Rice

Interjections denoted in []'s and blue.

00:00

EH: Alright. So could you tell me your name, and where you're from and when you were born?

MR: My name is Morgan Rice and I'm from Helvetia, and I was born July 27, 1998.

EH: Could you tell me about, uh, your family?

MR: My family... uh, is the Farhners and the Rices and that also includes the Mailloux. And my great-grandmother Eleanor Mailloux and one of her best friends started the restaurant [the Hutte]. And whenever she passed away she left it to five and that's my great aunt Heidi [Arnett], my cousin Willie [Lehman], my uncle Bill, my father Henry [Rice] and another cousin Lindsay Gorby. And Heidi pretty much keeps things in line for us, but everybody works together to keep things going. And Helvetia has always been home. I've lived in different counties and different states, but Helvetia has always been home to us.

EH: What are some of your memories of uh, the Hutte when you're growing up?

MR: Um, well some of the memories, well let's see. We always when you were younger it was cool to "Oh, I'm washing the dishes at the Hutte," or "Oh, I'm cutting the lemons at the Hutte!" We were like "Oh, I have a job and you don't have..." [Emily laughs] so that was kind of, you know, that was fun for us as children. And Mutter was always very—Mutter is Eleanor—and Mutter was always very welcoming to anybody so, "Oh come in and you know, enjoy yourself, take your time." So, there are two swinging gates between the kitchen and the breezeway [at the Hutte]. And as a small child you want, it's just your nature to swing on the gates. And Mutter was saying "Get off them damn gates! Don't touch the gates, quit swinging on the damn gates!" So you'd have to go away from the gates, you know. And later you're like, "oh she's not looking!" And she would come from anywhere and say "Git! Are you on those gates?!" So of course, that was, that's a fond memory of Mutter. [laughs]

So. You know so we'd be like "Oh, lunchtime, let's go to the restaurant!" So of course when you're ten years old you don't think—"Oh, they're busy, maybe I shouldn't, maybe I should make my own sandwich." So we'd come in and we'd be like "Hey! Can I have a sandwich? One day I went into the restaurant and I was like "Uh, can I get a roast beef sandwich with tomatoes and lettuce?" and Mutter was sitting in her chair in the breezeway and she comes around the corner, "Don't you think it would be proper to ask me first?" And I said, "Uh, yeah, probably!" [Emily laughs] So from then on I think I asked every time, "Uh, Heidi do you think it'd be alright if I got a bowl of soup?" Even though it's family, it's still—you need to ask, just because, I don't know why, but... [laughs]

2:55

EH: Right. Yeah, that's funny. So you'd hop in a lot and just get food?

MR: Yeah, we definitely hopped in a lot and got food. And then you know, um, I began working there when I was thirteen. So washing dishes, cutting lemons as I mentioned, you know, small things, small tasks. Sweeping up messes. [uh-huh] You know, greeting people, that kind of thing when I was about thirteen. Um, I did not start getting paid 'til I was fifteen and then I got paid the waitress wages and I was able to keep some of my tips which was great when I was thirteen you know? I was like, "Yes! This is so awesome!" So of course, now I'm like "Yes!" Buffet season is awesome when it comes back in because you know you get things like... I would never go in and be like, "Can I get a sauerbraten dinner?" just because I know the girls would be like "Are you kidding me." So it is definitely a treat when buffet season comes in and it is also a treat when it comes out. Because when buffet season's in you know every Sunday what you're getting is. What you're having.

3:59

EH: Ah yeah. Uh-huh

MR: Yeah, so.

EH: Because the sauerbraten is... like, a lot of work to do so they don't like to make it?

MR: Um, yeah, the sauerbraten is—you don't ask for that and you don't ask for rostis because the rostis take about twenty minutes to fry and it's a lot of... a lot of work to get 'em to, you know... and everybody that works there is a perfectionist, so...

EH: That's why it's so good.

MR: Yeah.

EH: Um, so why do you think... what is the importance of the restaurant here?

MR: Well I think that the restaurant's important because it brings a lot of people to Helvetia. Especially you know, word of mouth is the best... the best... form of advertisement. So if somebody comes here and is like "Ah man, I really love..." whatever, and go tell, "It's just you know, the most beautiful town," all this, and they go tell somebody else, of course these people are gonna be like, "Oh really, cool!" So it really helps bring people here and... explore more.

And it also just, I feel like it is a staple to Helvetia because it ties together the Swiss atmosphere. You know, when you walk down the road and you smell the rostis frying, or the chicken baking, the curry chicken baking, then you're like "Aw man!" It just feels like Helvetia. And definitely you can tell when they are frying chicken because it is... And when it is curry all the way [Emily laughs]. And when you walk in there you're walking out with curry in your clothes.

EH: Um, so what's your favorite thing to eat there?

MR: My favorite thing to eat... oh man, probably a rosti, just because we don't get them often and potatoes anyway are pretty much good.

5:52

But, I like the rosti and the sausage. The homemade sausage in red sauce.

EH: It is so good.

MR: It is so good. It is one of a kind, you'll never find it anywhere else.

EH: Yeah. Um, oh, so have you learned any of the recipes?

MR: Actually yes. Last Sunday my father was making the onion quiche for the buffet. And he was kneading the pie crust and I was like—"that pie crust is so flaky!" And I was watching, you know, from a distance and so man, it is so flaky and it is so light—I bet that would be so good in a pie, you know?

So I'm kind of pondering around, it's ten in the morning and the buffet doesn't start 'til noon and I was like, I have time. So I made up the pie crust myself and made a delicious apple crumble pie and it was the best thing *ever*. And it was gone in like ten minutes. I was like hey guys—I called everyone and was like hey, you wanna try my onion quiche pie... it's not onion quiche, but it's made with the onion quiche crust.

EH: ([laughs])

MR: And that was good. And I work at the restaurant in the summer too, part-time, waitressing. And I also have another job in Selbyville too and I babysit.

EH: Wow.

MR: And so part-time I work at the restaurant waitressing and part of being a waitress is you are, you're not, you don't just waitress, it's like being a dishwasher—you don't just wash dishes. Everybody has their own little side jobs. So, you know, I have to a lot of times help make the kraut, applesauce, salad dressing. I've made the sausage, mixed it up and pattied it out, the sausage sauce... I mean there's *so* many things that have to be done that everybody has to pitch in, whether you're a waitress or a dishwasher or the cook—everybody helps everybody. Which is kind of nice.

EH: Yeah. Oh, um, I keep getting lost in thinking about sausage. Um, oh—what is in the pie crust? Is it butter?

MR: The pie crust has a lot of shortening and it makes it very flaky. And very light and is... nice. [laughs] It's nice.

EH: So did the pie get served at the restaurant or was it...

MR: The pie did not get served at the restaurant because it was, you know...very small pie so it would have not lasted very long. But the pie did get served to all of the staff that was there that day and Aunt Heidi was called over to have some with Jerry as well.

EH: So did you get up eating Swiss recipes at home too?

MR: Um, whenever my grandma Cathy was alive, and the earlier years of my childhood, I remember a little bit but mostly it was everybody kind of wanted something other than the Swiss recipes when we got home. Grandma Cathy would incorporate a lot of like nutmeg in things and different things like that but

she... she wasn't like "Oh let me make some sauerbraten." I think because it was such a specialty to have it at the restaurant.

8:52

EH: Yeah. Is nutmeg a Swiss thing?

MR: Nutmeg is... yeah. It... Yes.

EH: I know it's on the cobbler.

MR: It is. Yes. And if the cobbler doesn't have the nutmeg on the whipped topping, the homemade whipped topping, then the cobbler does not taste like the Hutte's peach cobbler.

EH: I bet. Um, so what are some other ways that food is part of the community here?

MR: Well, we use food for a lot of our fundraising activities, so Fasnacht there's food. You know Christmas, New Year's Eve, there's food. We have the feast of St. Nicholas, we have the Ramp Dinner. I mean food is a very large part of our community and brings a lot of our money in to keep the town... to have the upkeep of the town. Help with the up keep of the town.

And so with the money that we raise from ramp dinner and all these different things, we use to... they go to the organization who host them. So the ramp dinner is hosted by Helvetia Farm Women Club and the Hall Association. So the funds that are raised get split between the two groups. So the Helvetia Farm Women helps with flower gardens and, um, if you notice that the siding might be coming off of a building we would help with that, or "Oh a bench might be nice here." So, you know, people may sit and look at the river. We do things like that.

The Hall Association runs the hall where the ramp dinner is hosted and they, they deal with the electric and the upkeep of the hall and they... obviously we could not have the Ramp Dinner without the hall association. And like I said before that with the Hutte, it wouldn't be the same if people came to Helvetia or if I come from home college and I don't smell the sausage cooking or I don't smell the chicken cooking because that just gives it the Swiss feel.

10:50

EH: Mmhm. Um, so could you tell me about the Ramp Supper—what do you remember of it as a kid?

MR: The ramp supper was always a big deal. I remember that all of the family came in and everybody has, you know, things that they're doing. Of course, you know, going to the cabin and having a camp fire. Or, uh, you know, it just depends on who you are. But I remember the family coming in and we would all work together. I know getting up early the day of the Ramp Dinner and having to peel the potatoes to be ready to be fried, and setting everything up, a lot of cleaning, uh, cleaning ramps, you'd come down after school every day for *weeks* to clean ramps. *Every day for weeks*. And you'd go to school and be like I'm really sorry that I smell like ramps but it is in my fingers. It is in my fingerprints.

So, and I always helped serve. I *love* people, I love to be around people. I always have my whole life, I'm very sociable. So I love to serve and I've always served and last year they wanted, they had an idea to get

rid of the Ramp Dinner. And that really upset me. I was like, “are you guys kidding?” You know, the ramp dinner is a big part of *my* life and *Helvetia’s* life really if you think about it. The ramp dinner brings so many people here, it helps with the restaurant. I mean people like will, people will come eat the Ramp Dinner, and then go eat at the restaurant. And it brings people here, it gets people together and it raises money for our community. So I sent an email to almost every person in Helvetia. Saying you know, the younger population of Helvetia does not want to rid of the... hamp dinner... Ramp Dinner because of its importance to us and it is such a staple to our community. Like, I know people who think of Helvetia, and are like oh yes, the Ramp Dinner and the Hutte. Those are the first two things that come to their mind!

12:47

So I sent an email and fortunately I had enough people sign my quote unquote petition that we had the Ramp Dinner last year and it was the best Ramp Dinner we’d had in like ten years. And it was pouring rain. It was awful weather, I would never go out in that weather, I would never be like, let’s go to the ramp dinner—never! I’d be like, no “let’s stay home and I’ll make soup” or something. It was an awful, cold, awful day. But we had a magnificent turnout but it was just like. It was so nice to see like a blossoming of... I don’t know how to explain it, it was very nice to experience that last year.

EH: And why do you think, um, it was so good last year?

MR: I don’t know why it was so good last year. I guess maybe, um... we had some people working for us, us as in Farm Women doing a little more advertising. So we were on the radio, we were in the newspaper, we were in The Prospector, we had signs all over, I mean, I think maybe the advertising. And like I said the word of mouth of anything is the best any... form of advertisement you can possibly get. So I don’t know, but it was a great year for all that to happen because I had pushed so hard. [laughs]

EH: [laughs] Good thing! So, uh, what’s your favorite part about it all, um, food wise?

MR: Oh the ramps. The ramps that are sautéed—Oh, I could eat those *all* day. And they hurt my stomach so bad but I don’t care. And I go to work and I’m like, “I know I’m sorry—I put all kinds of stuff on this morning and I still smell, I’m sorry.” [laughs]

EH: [laughs]

MR: So of course, you know. I also love just mingling with everyone and seeing new faces that haven’t been here before and getting to know people that I maybe didn’t know last year, getting... growing closer to the older folks in Helvetia. I know Cecelia Smith and I have become very close over the past two years just through Farm Women and the ramp dinner and everything.

14:52

EH: Are you part of Farm Women?

MR: I am part of Farm Women. And you know, whenever I joined I was fourteen years old and it was a bunch of old ladies having tea and crumpets. And I was *so* excited because I was a part of Helvetia Farm Women’s Club!

EH: [laughs] So what do you do with them?

MR: We have “Outgoing,” so we will go to different places like museums, and things and explore West Virginia. And also we do, we have the Ramp Dinner, we hold meetings. So we have the prisoners from Huttonsville come, and clean up, we make their food for them and help with the desserts and stuff for all the occasions.

Um, the 4-Hers, we work a lot with the 4-Hers, make them snacks and, you know, have clean-up days, you know, litter clean-up days with them, um, like I said before, if we notice something that might be needed, added to the community, we’ll help out with that. I know they’re working on a playground below the church and the Farm Women I think contributed some money to that cause, just because we love to see the community grow and anything to help, especially the younger generation to get them to stay around, which I don’t think any of us would leave, really I don’t. I know all the time I’m like “I’m not coming back here,” you know? But I know that even thinking about going to college, it’s like “Oh man! I’m gonna miss out on so much.” Being here every day and being here every weekend is really different.

EH: Really? Um, so could you tell me what, um, kind of things you, uh, have at the St. Nicholas celebration?

MR: Yeah. The Feast of St. Nicholas, the kids make gritzibons which is a type of bread formed into like almost a gingerbread man but with bread. And they put fruits, dried fruits and things on it to decorate it, of course. And then Santa Claus comes and hands out gifts of course, and we play different games and sing and have snacks and hot chocolate and then the story of St. Nicholas is read to the children.

So it’s a pleasant evening for families to bring their children out, and, you know, especially the gritzibons, the kids get to play in the kitchen and help make their gritzibons and decorate them. I know it’s a tradition of gingerbread men, just for us it’s gritzibons.

17:10

EH: Uh-huh. Is there a square dance?

MR: Mmhm. Sometimes I believe.

EH: And then tell me about the Community Fair.

MR: The Helvetia Fair is held in September. And a lot of people come for that too. So that’s also a big time like “Oh, it’s fair time, all the family’s gonna be in, everybody’s gonna be having fun and mingling.”

So a big part of that is the parade. Everybody prepares their floats, all the organizations and even some families make floats, you know by themselves. Like “Oh here’s the... the one we have is called Karlin Road Float because all of the—pretty much everyone that lives on Karlin are either really close friends or related.” So they do a float of Karlin Road and you know the Betler Family float, you have the Farm Women’s float, the Kultur Haus float, so you have all these floats that come through that just kind of identify the organizations’ personality as organizations.

So the Farm Women last year had a tea party on their float with flowers. And you know, the Karlin place usually does some kind of hunting theme or you know, happy time themes. You know, you can identify, oh well this organization probably does these things with this purpose, you know... by that.

EH: What about the food?

MR: The food at the fair.

EH: I'm always interested in the food.

MR: The food is a good part [Emily laughs]. We have food at the hall and it is served out the to-go windows and you can get usually like bratwurst, kraut, I know you can get like hamburgers, that kind of thing here. Then of course the Hutte and they do a sampler plate so it's a little easier on the faculty there.

The Kultur Haus will sometimes have hotdogs and that kind of thing up there, just because there's... it kind of gives the community—the people in the community a variety so they can—“Oh I want a bratwurst, or I can go eat at the Hutte,” or whatever they would like to do. Um, there aren't usually food vendors so like no funnel cakes, none of that kind of stuff, just because we like to keep it a little traditional.

Um, there's a craft hall and you can go in there and buy like pepperoni rolls that the ladies sell in there, or like cupcakes and a little banana bread, you know.

And usually the Pickens School organizations like track team, x-country, archery, PTA... they'll have bake sales set up to support themselves.

EH: What about, like the displays of canned goods and produce?

MR: Yeah, okay. That is at the Hall where the Ramp Dinner is being held today and they have it set up very nicely and people will enter anything. “Oh, the cake, this loaf of bread,” everything they've canned, you know, we get all kinds of stuff. So I usually enter photography and art because those are the things that interest me and what I do so, I don't have anything else.

Um, people grow things in their gardens and what they harvest if they feel like it is something you know, elaborate then they will enter it or... and blue ribbons around here is a big deal. Now if we get a blue ribbon we have to hang it up on a peg in our house because that's where the blue ribbons go. And we have probably about 48 blue ribbons there.

And so dad really pushes us kids to enter a lot of things. Like “Oh...” he found a dandelion one time that was probably three inches in diameter [Wow!]. And we had never seen anything like it so he was like “*Should we enter it to the fair!?*” And I was like, you would win because nobody else is gonna enter a dandelion into the fair. You know. So the fair is definitely a big part. And I know the older ladies and families spend a lot of times preparing their loaves of bread to be judged, or their batch of cookies—the perfect batch, it has to be a perfect batch of cookies. And everybody kind of takes pride in that like “Oh, my can won a blue ribbon!” or “Oh did you put a loaf of bread in the fair last year? So did I and I got the ribbon.” You know, it's kind of—it's a little bit of competition for our community which is nice—you need that sometimes.

21:17

EH: Do you think the food here and what people make at home, farming—do you think that's changed since you've, you know since you were little?

MR: Oh most definitely. Just because I feel that, you know, we have people that work with the Hutte or that are friends with the staff at the Hutte are like “Oh I grew some tomatoes here is some fresh-grown tomatoes.” Those are definitely different than the Walmart-bought tomatoes, I mean...I can’t even explain the difference there. So people will contribute their harvest to the Hutte and to things like that. Or as I said for the Fair, they will use their harvest for competition and but... I don’t think recipes have changed that much at the Hutte. I really don’t. I think some of them have been tweaked a little bit to like “Oh, well this”—uh, somebody might make a comment in the staff, “well I feel like this is a little too salty” so they’ll tweak it just a little bit and they’re like “Ah, perfect,” you know. Like I said they’re perfectionists so they will do something until it’s something that you can take pride in. You know?

EH: Uh-huh. Do you think your dad has ever tweaked any of the recipes of his mother’s?

MR: Well I will tell you that all three chefs that we have at the Hutte right now that are the people that will cook for us, they all do cobbler differently.

So Melissa, her cobbler is very sweet and very syrupy so we all love that ‘cause we’re like “oh yes—all that brown sugar is so delicious, you know.” And my father’s is more cake-y and um, like, moist, like wet kind of. And Debbie’s cobbler is like cake with peaches on it. So everybody does their cobbler a little different.

So yes, dad has definitely tweaked the recipes because... and also when cooking the chicken, they don’t measure the spices they put on, so the chicken is probably different every time cause they’re like oh, shake a little curry, shake a little of this, do this and that. So you know, everybody does it a little... I think everybody does it a little different. And Debbie and Melissa are the ones successful at making bread that raises properly and bakes properly. My father’s is a little too dense but he’ll get there—I have faith in him.

EH: [laughs] Do they have like a sourdough or do they use yeast?

MR: They use yeast. Yeast.

EH: So it’s like a sandwich bread with a lot of butter.

MR: Yes. And it is just—you won’t find it anywhere else.

EH: Yeah, Debby was telling me yesterday that Eleanor used to like rye bread but they don’t make any more cause it takes so long.

MR: Yeah, it does take a long time.

EH: So how do you think that you will carry on, um, you know, food traditions and recipes here?

MR: Well of course I’ll make them in my home whenever I have a home of my own. Um, I’ll definitely bring people from college and introduce new people all the time. I really like to introduce new people, “Oh look where I’m from,” you know? This is a place that I really take pride in as a young adult and feel—I feel very content here. So I would hope to think that one day, you know, when my father passes, or, you know the five that are currently owners of the Hutte will pass it to me or my brothers that way it

still stays in the family and, you know, um, I would like to take part in it someday just because I'm so proud and I am very appreciative to be a part of such a unique place.

EH: Mmhm. Are there other people your age and younger um,—are they interested in it as much as you?

24:55

MR: Um, not really. A lot of the younger people my age are more like “I can't wait to get out of here,” you know. They have different interests. I guess I was just raised very cultural and very—I was always very involved with my community. I've always volunteered a lot and I've always been very interested in everything going on and the other people kind of stay to themselves, you know we have DSL now...

EH: What's that?

MR: Internet. [laughs]

EH: Oh! Yeah. [laughs] Yeah.

MR: So.

EH: Probably changed things.

MR: Which I love the internet—don't get me wrong [well yeah]. But I also love my community. So...

EH: Cool. Um, well is there anything else you'd like to add?

MR: I don't think so! I think we covered it all.

EH: Thank you very much.

MR: Yep, you're welcome.

EH: Great interview. I have a ...

25:40

END OF TAPE