

RODNEY BABINEAUX
Babineaux's Slaughter House & Meat Market—Breux Bridge, LA

Date: July 24, 2007
Location: Breux Bridge, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 49 minutes
Project: Southern Boudin Trail

[Begin Babineaux's - Boudin Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Tuesday, July 24, 2007 and I'm in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. Could I get you to say your full name and your birth date?

00:00:15

Rodney Babineaux: Rodney Babineaux, Jr. October 2, 1954.

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SR: And could you say for the record how you make your living?

00:00:24

RB: I process beef, pork, and I make boudin and cracklings. Basically that's it: cutting and wrapping and processing for people, and then selling meat on the side.

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SR: And what's the name of your store?

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RB: Babineaux's Slaughter House and Meat Market.

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SR: How long has the store been around?

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RB: I want to say 37 years—actually, yeah.

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SR: And who started it?

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RB: My father—well actually, my mother started it. She's the one that was working at the market before we had it, and she would just help out, and then all of the sudden the guy decided he didn't want to put up with meat inspections and he wanted to get out. And when he got out my father was working with the railroad, and she decided it was a good turn for the best. And they did—they went out and they borrowed some money and they started it out in 1971. And they just basically started out with \$500, and they came out and they had a business and we started off with that. He retired from the railroad and he decided to do it.

00:01:30

SR: Are your parents alive?

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RB: Yes. My—both of them are 78 years-old. They're retired. They don't, they don't do too much. Mama used to bake cakes. She worked over here 'til she was about 62, and then she decided to go and bake cakes and she baked wedding cakes for about 15 years. She just retired from that too. She got rid of that.

00:01:55

SR: And so she was always sort of a food person, I guess.

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RB: Yes. She's the one who showed us how to cut meat, and then she showed us how to start off in it. And then when I graduated I decided to go to meat-cutting school, which I went to in Toledo, Ohio for three months, in a meat-cutting course that you went and you were basically on the job training. And it was—it was pretty interesting. I learned a lot more things over there than what I knew before, right.

00:02:23

SR: So that was after high school?

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RB: Yeah. Yes, ma'am, after high school, right. And I went over there and I came back and I started back again over here.

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SR: And what is your heritage? Where are your ancestors from, I mean—?

RB: Right here. Cajun country. Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. That's it. I've never been nowhere(s). We have some family around from—in Groves, Texas, but that's about it. Everybody else stayed here.

00:02:52

SR: Do you know if they—if your, you know grandparents or great-grandparents came from Canada or France or—do you know?

00:02:58

RB: Oh definitely, yeah; yeah, they did. We have some—they have some Babineauxs that are Canadian originated. Yes they do. I've talked to some of them and I've met them, you know. We had a Babineaux reunion quite a few years back and they were there, and they all came down. But it—they do have a lot of Canadians that are Babineauxs, yes, and the LeBlancs. See, I'm half-LeBlanc.

00:03:23

SR: LeBlanc—can you spell that?

RB: L-e-b-l-a-n-c. Right.

00:03:29

SR: Okay, that's your mother's maiden name?

00:03:32

RB: Correct, right. So I'm Cajun on both sides.

00:03:37

SR: You must have had half of Acadiana at your reunion.

00:03:39

RB: Say that again.

00:03:40

SR: There are a lot of LeBlanc and—?

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RB: Oh yes—oh yes, definitely. A lot of LeBlancs, yes. Oh yeah, and when we grew up my mother was working, and believe it or not when I went to school they had to teach me English. I'm not joking 'cause I had—my grandma always talked French all the time. She didn't have no English orientation, so when she—when my mother was working, while she was working we'd go visit with—we'd stay with her, and they would talk French and that's all we knew. And when I went to school in the first grade, they had to teach me English.

00:04:20

SR: Wow. Can you—do you still speak French?

00:04:22

RB: Oh very fluently. I've got a granddaughter seven months old, and [*Speaks a few sentences in French*]. And don't think she don't know 'cause when I speak to her, when I walk in the room—she's eight, seven months old—and when I walk in the room she knows I'm there and she—. Because I figured out in my, in my sense of view, how did I learn it? My grandparents. Well, if you don't speak it to them, they won't ever learn it. How do you learn English? You sure don't go to school and learn English. You have to learn French. Well they come, and we do it—that's how we do that. I'll speak to her in nothing but French.

00:05:03

SR: And your kids, do they speak it?

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RB: No, they didn't want to learn. And they're mad now because they didn't learn it. I said, *Nah, that's your problem.*

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SR: So I'm curious: in Acadiana, is French taught in school at all?

00:05:19

RB: Yes. I went—I thought I was smart and I was going to go into—when I was in high school I thought I was going to pass through an easy course and I would go and take French. Huh, wrong.

[Laughs] It was the French-French; it's not the Cajun French. I'm teaching—I speak the Cajun French, and there's a difference, and there really truthfully is. The original French, sometimes when I talk to some of these people from France I have a problem understanding them because they speak so well. They speak a good French, you know. I just, I'll speak the Cajun French, and it's a good French but I just have problems sometimes listening to them, you know.

00:05:55

SR: What about, you work with your brother, and what's his name?

00:06:00

RB: Larry.

00:06:00

SR: Larry. And do ya'll speak French to each other ever?

00:06:03

RB: Well once in a while—not often. I speak more French with my customers than I do with anybody else 'cause I—in this kind of business you have to know French because some of the people that come here don't talk English. They speak French.

00:06:18

SR: Huh, the older people I'm guessing.

00:06:22

RB: No, not always. Not necessarily older people. Some of the younger people, they'll walk in and they'll fluently just talk French. Yeah, it's—that's the way they do that.

00:06:33

SR: And so well, let me just say one of the more unusual things that you do here is you make red boudin. Can you describe what that is?

00:06:44

RB: It's a regular boudin that we make. It's a plain boudin, and all you do is add pork blood to it which the—I can't remember—. Yeah, as I can remember, when I was in one place, the Germans call it a "blood sausage" and we call it a "red boudin." And it's the same thing, but it's just a different name, and they make it the same way we do. And I questioned it to those—some of those people—and they make it the exact same way we do. We have a regular boudin with the meat, the rice and everything, and then you just put in pork blood and it makes a red boudin. And you thoroughly cook it.

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SR: So that was in Texas, you said, that you met the Germans?

00:07:29

RB: Round Top, Texas. Yeah.

00:07:31

SR: Round Top, huh.

00:07:31

RB: And they do have some that come over here. They do come. Some of them, when they hear about it they come—they come buy it.

00:07:40

SR: So you use the same kind of seasonings and everything that you put in your, what you call white boudin, huh?

00:07:46

RB: Right. It's the same seasonings, same type of boudin and everything is made. The only thing that's different is the blood, pork blood.

00:07:53

SR: And why do you think hardly anybody makes that in Louisiana anymore?

00:08:01

RB: Well hold on.

00:08:06

SR: Yeah, yeah. I was asking why the red boudin is hard to come by. This is the first place I've seen it.

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RB: The red boudin is hard to come by because it's only made inside of a slaughterhouse. The only reason you can sell it is because you have a meat inspector inside your plant and the inspector is there while you're processing your pork blood, and he's there to see that you've done it properly. That's the only reason why.

00:08:31

SR: And so people who don't slaughter their own animals wouldn't have their own pork blood.

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RB: No. It's not—it would be artificial or something. They're putting something else in it because they had—I'm not saying they did, but I don't know, but it might be possible. But there's only about three, four plants around in this area that do it. So that's—that's about the only one. And everybody knows that it comes from a slaughterhouse, so that if you're selling it in a different store it's not the real thing. And they all know that, so—.

00:09:02

SR: Because I understand from what your brother said earlier that if you don't use your own blood it's not, you're not allowed to make it. Is that right?

00:09:11

RB: If you don't use—?

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SR: If you don't use blood from your own pigs?

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RB: Right. You're not allowed to make it because the meat inspector is not there, you know. If you don't have a meat—it has to be Louisiana State inspected; that's why it has to be done that way. And you can't wholesale it. I cannot wholesale it. I can sell it in my plant all the time I want, but it—I cannot have someone else selling it for me. That's the only problem.

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SR: Could you ship it if you wanted to?

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RB: No, no. They won't let me ship it. If I get caught shipping it they shut me down. They stop me from doing it.

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SR: So the only way to eat Louisiana red boudin is to come here?

00:09:49

RB: I've never tried—I never did ship it 'cause I never did get involved with it but no, I never heard—. You know, I never asked about it but I don't do it, you know. I'm just—I'm glad to sell it here, that I can make me a living. That's all.

00:10:04

SR: And so how often does the meat inspector come? How many times a week do you make it?

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RB: Once a week. Once a week he's here, yeah. I don't have a very large plant. I just got a small plant and so it's—I just need one for once a week and that's it.

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SR: And do you—I think you were saying that you might not know the weights, but do you know about how many pounds or links that you make a week?

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RB: Approximately 400 pounds a week, you know that I'll make 200 of each: 200 of white and 200 red per week. Wintertime a little bit more: we might go 500-600, a little bit more than that in the wintertime. People eat, tend to eat more boudin in the winter 'cause it's too hot in the summer. When it gets in the 90s and stuff like that—90--95 degrees—people won't eat pork in the hot weather. They'll eat it in the cold weather, but they won't eat it in the hot weather. And it's—meat is the same thing. People will tend not to eat meat as much in the summertime

because it's too hot. So they'll slack off and eat vegetables or other things besides pork or beef, you know. They might eat it once a day, but like in the wintertime they'll eat it maybe two or three times a day. That's the difference that it makes 'cause my business does slow down a lot in the summer. Oh yeah.

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SR: Can you describe for me the difference in taste between the red and the regular boudin?

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RB: The white one, yes, it's very good. And then the red one, I eat it once in a while. It's like everything else: when you work in something and you cook it all day long, it's hard to say that you can taste it, but it has a very—totally different taste. And the red one is good. It's a very good-tasting boudin, but I just—how to see the difference, I just can't. Let me back up on that one **[Laughs]**. I'm trying to think of, you know, like—. It is different, I know that, but like I tell all my friends, I'll eat—the only time I'll eat boudin—. I'm going to give you an example. The doctor—I have a high blood pressure and I'm a little bitty person. He tells me, he said I've got to lay off the boudin and the cracklings. And I said, *Doc, you're wrong*. Why? I said, *Because I don't eat it*. I'll eat it—I'll bring it when I go camping, and I'll taste it there, and I'll eat it there and it's only maybe two--three--four links. Not even that. So you know, so a lot of people say that pork is bad for your blood. It's not. I don't believe it 'cause I've had a lot of people come over here with heart problems, and they say it's good to eat lean pork. Figure that one out, huh?

[Laughs]

00:12:41

SR: So you had to cut something else out of your diet, huh?

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RB: I never did.

00:12:44

SR: No?

00:12:43

RB: My blood pressure is fine now. I don't know why it was—blood pressure is hereditary, and then a lot of it is nerves and stress. I think that's—because the doctor asked me, he said, *What you doing?* I said, *Well I'm, my daddy just retired and we just started a new business, our business, and we just—*. He said, *Well, you're stressed out.* And that's basically what does it.

00:13:04

SR: It's pretty much constant work here, isn't it?

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RB: Oh yes, yeah. All the time. We always got something to do. Cajuns, we work. **[Laughs]**
That's all we do.

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SR: I noticed.

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RB: Oh yeah. We do, we do.

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SR: What time do you start in the morning?

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RB: Oh I'm at 5 o'clock in the morning. I go to 8 o'clock at night--9 o'clock. I just—just steady, you know, things to do. Like when I get home I go in the yard or do this, do that. The doctor told me I was crazy because I don't stop. I said, *Sorry*.

00:13:37

SR: Maybe that's hereditary too.

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RB: Oh it is. When I was young they—my grandma would wake us up in the morning and we had to go pick corn before we went to school. Oh yeah, we had to go pick our corn before we went to school. [*Interruption*]

00:14:00

SR: Did your mom teach you how to make the red boudin?

00:14:03

RB: Yes, right, definitely. My mama is the one that showed us how to do it. She was doing it before we started into it, so she basically showed us how to do—she showed us how to make the red, the white, and cut meat. When I graduated I started working with my dad, and it was a black man that was working back there, and he showed me how to skin cattle. And that's how we started. You know we just started from there on out.

00:14:31

SR: Hmm. Can you take me through the process without revealing any family secrets—take me through the process of making a batch of boudin?

00:14:37

RB: Yeah. You got to start, you put your—you get your black iron pot and put your water boiling, and put basically all the meat that you want to put in there—your meat, your liver and everything. A lot of people say the season—I'm going to give you an example of how we make our boudin different. A lot of people say they put their seasonings in the meat. I don't.

00:15:00

SR: By seasoning, do you mean—?

00:15:02

RB: Their seasoning.

00:15:04

SR: Their spices or their vegetables?

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RB: The spices. There's no vegetables in there at all. So you put your seasoning in there. Everybody says they put their seasoning in there. So one day we were working in here and we had the boudin; a batch of meat was finished cooking, so the meat inspector—one of the guys, the meat inspector we work with is friends of ours, and he walked in and he said, *Boy, that meat smells good. Oh*, I said, *You want some just to sample?* Yeah. So I put him some meat on there and he said, *Man, your seasoning is good in there.* I said, *There's no seasoning.* But you got to understand: fresh meat. Fresh meat and boxed meat—what I call box meat is like store-bought. You know it's different, 'cause he [the inspector] said he goes to another plant and the meat don't taste like that, and they season theirs. And mine wasn't even seasoned and it tastes good. So you know that fresh meat is better for you any day, any day.

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SR: So it was just meat in water in yours?

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RB: That's all.

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SR: Wow.

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RB: Nothing else. Then after that, after that we take it and you cook your rice, and then we got to bone out everything. When you bone out everything, you take all the meat and you pass it through a meat grinder. And about the only thing I put in mine is onions, and you—you pass it through the grinder. When you pass it through the grinder, you put it in a food mixer; you got to put it inside of a food mixer. Once you put it inside the food mixer, you season—that's when I put my seasoning in there, and we just taste according to what we need. And then after that you just stuff it inside of a casing. And after that you put it in your cooler and let it refrigerate until the next day.

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SR: Do you put green onions in yours?

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RB: I never—. I tried green onions one time and the people got mad. They didn't like it over here, so I had to stop. It's different people in different parts of the country that—see some other part, like in the northern part over there, everybody uses green onions. Around here nobody uses green onions—none of us.

00:16:56

SR: And so what do you mean by seasoning? Like salt and pepper and maybe cayenne?

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RB: I don't put no cayenne. I just use salt and pepper, a basic mix that I use. That's about it. I don't put no cayenne in mine. I used it—that I tried too, and the people didn't like it either. They said it gave them heartburn. *[Laughs]*

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SR: And then how much blood will you put in one batch?

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RB: We just basically put to what we decide is good, you know. A mixture 'til it mixes up to enough to where it cooks, you know, it takes the whiteness out of the red—you know the red takes the whiteness out of the white boudin. That's what we do.

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SR: And how much blood will you get out of one pig?

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RB: I will say about half gallon. I will say about a half—maybe not even. Sometimes it depends. About a half gallon.

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SR: What parts of the animal do you use for boudin, or maybe what parts don't you use? Do you use everything?

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RB: Basically you use like the pork hocks, head. I use the heads. The heads make a delicious boudin. Some people say, *Why you use that?* I say [**Phone Rings**]—

00:18:07

SR: You want to get that? We'll pause. So you use the head?

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RB: Yes. We do use the head, pork hocks, and sometimes ribs, and you know just basically pieces of meat, you know that—that we put into that.

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SR: But your brother was telling me no feet or—?

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RB: No, no. We don't use the pig feet. Not at all, no. We don't do that. It doesn't—it's not feasible to use that.

00:18:35

SR: How long will that meat boil?

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RB: Approximately three hours to boil it—the size pot that we use, it takes approximately three hours to boil it.

00:18:46

SR: And so you grew up in the culture of boudin eating.

00:18:53

RB: Correct. Oh yes. Definitely, oh yeah. I've been—I've got friends of mine that have made boudin, and we all clown each other about who makes the best boudin, but it doesn't matter. I got like one, two, three, four—four of them that make boudin.

00:19:07

SR: In this area?

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RB: Uh-hm. We all know each other. We clown each other because we—who makes the best boudin, oh yeah.

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SR: Yeah, I was going to ask, so there isn't—there isn't like angry competition?

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RB: Oh no, definitely not. No, not at all. Because they—in a sense of way they have their customers, I've got mine. And you know he makes his boudin when—when the people go there, they going to like their boudins and that's the way they like. They'll come to me and they'll like, they'll eat my boudin. That's because they like mine. And like I got one friend of mine in Cecilia. He makes boudin(s), and his is so peppered you can't eat them, and I clown him because of that. But some—the people over there, that's what they like: they like his boudin because they're peppered. I said, *Well, I can't eat them*. Mine don't—people come, they leave Cecilia and come eat mine because it's not peppered. Some of them, not all of them you know. So it's all basically what everybody does.

00:20:00

SR: I mean, sometimes you'll see two boudin makers like next door to each other practically.

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RB: Oh yeah. Look at me. I'm right next door—I'm right here and Pcohe's is next door, so it's the same thing.

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SR: Yeah. But you're friendly with the Poche's?

00:20:14

RB: Yeah everybody. All of them.

00:20:17

SR: That's great. And so who all works—who from your family works in the business?

00:20:26

RB: My brother—my brother and I. His wife works with us in the winter. And I got my daughter used to work here, but she doesn't work here no more. And then my father and mother used to work here, but they retired, so now it's just my brother and I and my sister-in-law. That's about it.

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SR: And do you—is there anyone in the next generation of your kids who you think might take it over one day?

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RB: No. We don't know. I don't think so. My brother, we had—he had a son but he passed away, and my—I got two daughters, so that's gone. So apparently we'll have to sell it or something. *[Laughs]* We don't know.

00:21:05

SR: I met one of your daughters today. She was helping out, right?

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RB: Right, right. That's my—that's correct.

00:21:13

SR: She likes it in here.

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RB: Oh she loves it in here. She wants to stay here, but I don't have enough business for her. I don't have enough business for her to take care—you know, to stay over here all the time. She wants full-time work. She cooks. She's a cook.

00:21:23

SR: Oh she is?

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RB: Yeah, so—.

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SR: I was going to ask you if you're the cook in the family, or who cooks in your household?

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RB: I do.

00:21:33

SR: Yeah? *[Laughs]*

00:21:36

RB: When I got married my wife wouldn't cook. I cooked, and I do love to cook. I do—I do a pretty good job of cooking; make a mean jambalaya. Oh yeah, I make a real good jambalaya.

00:21:43

SR: What do you put in there?

00:21:47

RB: Pork sausage, onions. I haven't tried the chicken yet. I'm trying to get to the chicken part, and I make a—but I can't make a small, I got to make a big one. I cook for like 200 or 300 at a time. I don't know how to make a small one. *[Laughs]*

00:22:03

SR: What about gumbo? I'm also working on gathering gumbo stories. Do you make a gumbo?

00:22:07

RB: Oh yeah, I make a good gumbo. My mother-in-law taught me how to make a gumbo—make a good gumbo.

00:22:13

SR: What kind?

00:22:13

RB: Chicken. I like chicken gumbo. I don't, I never did the seafood. I don't cook seafood, but I make a good chicken gumbo. Now I make an awesome pork fricassee: pork stew. Boy I make a good pork stew.

00:22:27

SR: Can you tell me the process of making that?

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RB: Pork stew is like you got to get your roux. You got to get your basic roux. Which a lot of people don't understand what that is, but it's like a flour that you take and you brown it up real good, and you got to brown it and brown it and brown it until you get to that roux brown. And make it—and then you put it in your water and you boil it, and you put your meat and your onions and spices that you want to put in there, and you just basically cook it down to where it—you have a pork stew, yeah.

00:22:59

SR: Wow. And so you make your own roux? You don't buy the jarred roux?

00:23:02

RB: My mother-in-law used to make it for me, but she passed away. Now I got to buy it. I don't know how to make it. But I can make it if I want to. I can do it. Take some flour and then some

oil and you cook it all in—you basically brown it up in there. It takes a little while to do it, but it's good, and there's some good roux.

00:23:18

SR: And so when you make your chicken gumbo, do you put sausage in there?

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RB: Oh yes, fresh sausage. I don't put—I never did smoked. I never did get into the smoked sausage. I just don't, it gives me heartburn to begin with, so I don't put it.

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SR: And do you put filé in there?

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RB: Gumbo filé, yeah. I don't put it in there. If people want it they add it to the gumbo, because a lot—I cook in a way that if you want to put something in there you do it yourself, you know. I won't add it because, you know, it's—you can't please everybody, so you got to please some of the people. That's what I do.

00:23:55

SR: What about okra? Do you put okra in the gumbo?

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RB: Yeah, I've done that before. My wife loves okra, so I cook it. I do it.

00:24:01

SR: Yeah, in the chicken gumbo?

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RB: Oh yeah, chicken yeah. Oh yeah.

00:24:04

SR: Okay. So you'd put okra and roux—you use rue and okra in your gumbo at the same time?

Just wondering about the rules, the gumbo rules.

00:24:13

RB: Gumbo—you can put, gumbo you can put okra in. That you can do. Now the, the stew, I never did put okra in the stew—no. Or you could okra in a little pot and you put it on the side and eat it on the side too, you know. But I'll put okra in the gumbo.

00:24:30

SR: Let me go back to the store here. Why do you think there are so few places selling fresh, you know, freshly slaughtered meats these days?

00:24:43

RB: It's getting, it's getting harder and harder to put up, you know, with the employees? The employees is number one subject, 'cause like I've hired some people like to go on the kill floor to work, the processing floor, and I said, *Well, you want to get work?* He said, *Yeah*. Damn good money, but you put them on the kill floor, and you show them what they want to do. The first time they see blood they run. **[Laughs]** And then basically, the people want to—they don't want to work too much no more. It's not, it's not hard work. It's just—. I'll do the work. I used to weigh 115-pounds, and I would slaughter a 700-pound animal. But the machine does the work for you. All the machines do the work for you, and it's not basically hard. It's not a very hard job 'cause in—I do some 4-H animals for the New Iberia Livestock Show, and they do like 18 animals—18 to 20 animals—steers, weighing average of 700-pounds apiece live weight. And my brother and I and one man on the kill floor, we can start at 7:00 in the morning; at 12 o'clock they're all in the cooler. So it's not hard work. It's very easy work, but it's—'cause the machines do the work for you. Pigs are the same thing. I can do five pigs an hour at 250-pounds apiece. It's not hard. The machine does the work for you.

00:26:11

SR: But what machine are you talking about?

00:26:11

RB: The hog, like the hog machine is a hog scraping machine. But they got hoists and they got saws. They got machines, big saw machines that saw everything for you. It's—the only work you got to do is skinning. That's it. It's not bad, not at all.

00:26:29

SR: That's what I saw that man Jonathon doing today, was skinning. And that you do just by hand with a knife, huh?

00:26:35

RB: I do—he does it with a knife. I do it with a knife, and they have a machine that skins that. But like when I was small I was using it; it was like an electric knife, and then the machine—the thing was this big [**motions with his hands**] and I was so small I couldn't hold the thing because it would hurt my wrists. So I did it, and the black man that was teaching me when I was growing up, he'd skin—he was the same way. He'd skin them by hand, so that's what we do. And I can basically skin a calf in 15-minutes, a 700-pound animal in 15-minutes. I did it in eight when I was young.

00:27:14

SR: [*Laughs*] And what about, like the rules and regulations that you have to meet when you're slaughtering your own animals? Is that—does that make it more difficult?

00:27:27

RB: Yeah. That's a big, big problem right now with the government. And I understand that we all have to do it. It's true. But they're given us, these little bitty plants so much—. I got to take e-coli tests, I got to take salmonella testing, I got to do all kinds of testing on the, on these animals and everything. And inside your coolers and inside your floor. Like I said, I graduated. I did go to school 12 years. I didn't go to college. I never thought I was going to go, and here I am 30—I

was 37 years-old, they telling me I got to go to LSU to learn the HACCP [Hazard At Critical Control Point] program [a food safety program]. I have to go four weeks to LSU to learn how to do the HACCP program. Which the HACCP program, they use in hospitals now and it's the same thing. And all it is is paperwork. It's a lot of paperwork, doing what you—reporting what you do. That's all. To me, that's my understanding of it you know.

00:28:27

SR: Uh-huh. And so a bigger operation would have, would be able to employ more people to do that? Is that—?

00:28:32

RB: Yeah. See like the more things that you do, like if I would be smoking sausage—well that's another—. They keep going and going and going until you have to have all these HACCP programs for everything that you do. Oh yeah. It's very, very difficult. A little bit—you know some of these guys, they got to hire people just to do the HACCP program, just to make them report and write down what they do. Over here we do it ourselves because we're small, you know.

00:29:02

SR: And what products do you make besides the two boudins?

00:29:07

RB: I do burgers, chicken burgers, and sausage. I do fresh sausage, and we process deer. That's a sideline thing that we do.

00:29:21

SR: So if someone shoots a deer, they can bring it in here?

00:29:25

RB: Definitely, oh yeah. Oh yeah. We process deer.

00:29:28

SR: And do you make sausage out of the deer for them, or do you just cut it up for them?

00:29:35

RB: Anything they want to do, we do it. We do it any way they want. I got deer sausage. Deer processing is a very big business. Very big.

00:29:44

SR: And you also get some more exotic animals in here, I understand, sometimes?

00:29:51

RB: Yeah. I do buffalo, I do elk, red stag, all these exotic animals. They bring them and I help them.

00:29:59

SR: Where do those come from?

00:30:01

RB: They have these exotic farms in an area; they have some in this area. There's about two of them, and then they have them in Texas. Exotic animals, and some of these people raise buffalo(s), and buffalo is getting to be a big business around here. It's starting to come around, and that's all exotic animals.

00:30:21

SR: So how long does somebody have if they kill—let's say they kill a buffalo or a deer, how long do they have to bring it in here before it's bad?

00:30:33

RB: Well the deer, the deer when they kill—when people kill deer they process it over there themselves. They'll take it, they have these places where they bring them, and they process it and they'll skin it and gut it and then quarter it and put in the ice chest or put it—. Half of them got coolers where they put them in, and then when they're ready to leave they quarter them and put them in ice chests, and they bring them to me in ice chests. And then that—the buffalo, they go to shoot them sometimes; approximately an hour—hour and a half—before they get here, before you know that—. It doesn't take that long to get it here anyway. It's all local people.

00:31:10

SR: Right. Can somebody bring you a cow or a pig that's already dead?

00:31:15

RB: No. They have to take—it has to be brought in live. Every animal, every domestic animal has to be brought in live. We used to be able to do that, but now they stopped us, so now it's—every domestic animal has to be brought in live.

00:31:33

SR: Where do you get the pigs and the cows that you use for the products that you make?

00:31:42

RB: The pigs I buy through a stockyard that I've been dealing with for 37 years, and then the cattle I buy from farmers, local farmers around here in the area. That's all been—these people raise animals, you know, so I buy from them. They all come—some of these farmers, some of these people retired and that's their past-time job, they raise cattle. So that's what they do.

00:32:04

SR: Huh.

00:32:05

RB: Oh yeah.

00:32:08

SR: And do the pigs eat anything in particular?

00:32:09

RB: Oh, when they get here all I feed them is corn. I just put them straight to corn. I don't feed them—some of those animals that they're feeding, they put them on a mixture, but then by the time they get—when they get here they're off that mixture. But I put them on corn. That's all I do.

00:32:21

SR: And how long might you have a pig before you turn it into boudin?

00:32:27

RB: Approximately a week. Maybe a week. I buy about eight or ten at a time or whatever, and I'll put them in the pen and then when I need them—I use them as I need, yeah.

00:32:42

SR: And so if the inspector isn't here, you can still slaughter a pig but just not save its blood?

00:32:51

RB: I can process custom slaughter, but not inspection-wise. When the meat inspector is here, I do inspection for my—my business. Other than that it's for, I do custom slaughter.

00:33:04

SR: You mean use somebody else's pig?

00:33:06

RB: Correct, yeah, yeah. A pig or calf or whatever.

00:33:10

SR: Right.

00:33:11

RB: Right.

00:33:12

SR: And I should say that you also sell pork chops and other cuts of just fresh meat. Is that right?

00:33:19

RB: Yeah. When I process a pig I sell the pork chops and the ribs and everything off of that, off of that animal that I process.

00:33:26

SR: What about, I saw a couple different kinds of pig in the back? A couple were brown and smaller and then—

00:33:32

RB: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:33:35

SR: —and then a couple were fatter and white. Can you tell the difference in flavor between the different pigs?

00:33:40

RB: The little ones--the little ones are what they call a cochon de lait pig. A cochon de lait pig is what you cook in them little boxes that [**Rodney points to a photo on the wall of a “Cajun microwave,” or a box in which whole pigs can be cooked**]**]**—and that’s what that is. Now that’s basically very, very, very tender. And you get into the—with those larger animals, they’re only five months old and they’re not very, they’re not very old. Some of those pigs are—that’s very tender meat. And that’s what I sell through my store.

00:34:07

SR: Do you make boudin out of the five-and-a-half-month-old ones?

00:34:13

RB: Yeah, that’s what we use. That’s, yeah. That’s what—boudin and cracklings off of that. That’s what we use.

00:34:17

SR: But the littler ones are just for cochon de lait?

00:34:20

RB: Right.

00:34:20

SR: You sell a whole—whole and half and quarter pigs for people to cook at home, right?

00:34:27

RB: Right. We cut them up. We cut them up. We want to process to their, to their needs.

00:34:35

SR: When you were growing up, did you have a boucherie tradition in your family?

00:34:39

RB: I used to do the boucherie for—they had a boucherie in St. Martinville, and I used to do it. I would process the—go over there and clean the hogs for these people by hand. We did it. I've done it before, yeah.

00:34:55

SR: For a family? You mean if they—?

00:34:57

RB: This is for, it's called La Grande Boucherie de Saint Martin [also called La Grande Boucherie des Cajuns]. It was a big boucherie and I went to do it, yeah.

00:35:04

SR: Oh that's fun. So you grew up in Breaux Bridge, though, is that right?

00:35:11

RB: Right, right.

00:35:13

SR: [*Phone Rings*] I'm going to pause that for a second. So I'm curious. I asked your brother about this too, but is there a certain type of person that buys the boudin made with the blood, or is it all kinds of people?

00:35:31

RB: All kinds of people, oh yeah. It doesn't matter.

00:35:32

SR: Kids?

00:35:34

RB: Kids, older people, middle-class, everybody. They all buy it. Oh yeah.

00:35:41

SR: Interesting. Have you ever had—well maybe this is what they were making in Texas, but like European boudin noir, blood sausage?

00:35:51

RB: It's exactly the same thing. It's the same thing. Yeah, exactly. That's what I was telling you about the Germans. The German boudin, that was the same thing. That's what it was.

00:36:01

SR: Do you use liver in your boudin?

00:36:04

RB: Yes, pork liver, pork liver. We definitely use that in there. It gives it a better flavor, right.

00:36:10

SR: Do you ever make hogshead cheese?

00:36:12

RB: Yeah, we do. We [*Interruption*]—.

00:36:17

SR: So you do make hogshead cheese to sell?

00:36:20

RB: Yeah, we do in the wintertime. Summertime it doesn't move too much, so we do make it in the wintertime.

SR: Oh okay.

00:36:26

RB: Oh yeah.

00:36:27

SR: And what about this Cajun specialty that I've seen a lot of, chaudin?

00:36:29

RB: No, I don't fool with that. I don't have the machine to clean all that and process it, so I don't fool with that.

00:36:36

SR: Because that's a stomach, right?

00:36:36

RB: Correct, correct. Yes.

00:36:41

SR: So I just paused the machine because a customer came in to buy some meat and you didn't have anything. I guess that's an indication of just exactly how fresh your meat is. Sometimes you run out by the end of the day, huh?

00:36:51

RB: Right. You see, if it's not in the food case they don't want it. If it's frozen they don't want it. If it's in the showcase, they'll buy it. Or, if I cut it, they'll buy it. That's the way they do it.

00:37:01

SR: They have high standards around here.

00:37:04

RB: Oh yes, very much. It's true. I got a bunch of ladies, people, that will come and if I don't do it on the spot they don't want it. It's true, oh yeah. They—and this is getting, this is something that is getting out of—the way I'm understanding it—. I haven't been some of these stores, but some of these big supermarkets, they don't get—they don't have no butchers back there. It's just boxed meat. I know where everything is coming from the packing house, and it's all boxed with a shelf-life. They put it on the shelf for so many days. If you read some of these books, the shelf life of 30 days, so they just put it in there and that's what they call their fresh meat. Now, how do you call that fresh meat? I don't understand it.

00:37:52

SR: I see a lot of signs for fresh meat around this part of the state, but in the smaller stores, do you think that's generally real fresh meat or boxed meat?

00:38:03

RB: No, it's not fresh. They can't—'cause it's got to come from up north. It's not coming from around here. Like—and it depends what you want to call fresh meat. This is fresh meat because I process my animal in the back. I put him in a cooler for a day or two, and then I start cutting on him. Now in the period of three days he's gone. Now that's fresh. Now it might take that—these boxed-meat people to send that down for a week, and then after a week it's got to stay in your store for another week, so is that considered fresh or what? Nah.

00:38:45

SR: Not so fresh.

00:38:46

RB: I don't—that's what I'm talking about, you know.

00:38:48

SR: Today I saw your employee kill a couple cows. He shot them. Is that how your mom used to do it?

00:39:00

RB: Exactly. The same way. Well, she didn't do it. That's what we did in them days, the same ways. Yes.

00:39:07

SR: Was that unusual, for a woman to be running a slaughterhouse?

00:39:11

RB: Yeah. She would cut meat on the saw. She would really cut the meat on the saw, oh yeah. And she was, and in them days that was back—that would have been 40 years ago, and that was unusual. But she'd get on the saw and she'd cut. She would.

00:39:27

SR: That's pretty exceptional.

00:39:29

RB: Yeah.

00:39:31

SR: And then did she have time to cook for the family and everything, or did your dad do that?

00:39:37

RB: We had a supper every night. She'd get home at 5 o'clock and she cooked dinner—she was cooking supper on the stove.

00:39:44

SR: It's pretty amazing.

00:39:44

RB: Oh it is.

00:39:48

SR: Can you give me some kind of indication of how much it would cost if someone brought you, let's say—well if someone brought you a deer, let's say, and wanted you to prepare it for them?

00:40:00

RB: It depends what you want to do with the deer. If you got it—if you basically just cut it and vacuum—. Let's say you want to cut it and vacuum pack, it's on the size. We go by the pounds, so that's another thing that I can't definitely give you a price. But I can tell you, it's like if it's just basic cut, it's about \$40. Now if you want to go down into making hamburgers and putting some, putting some pork in there, and making some sausage and things like that, then you run into \$100 bills. Like if I had people come over here, they bring me a 100-and-some-quart ice chest full of deer, and they tell me to grind the whole thing and add the same amount of pork and make me some sausage. Well you don't think about it—and vacuum pack it, you know. When they, when they get their bill it's \$400; they want to cry. I said, *Well you—I did what you told me*

to, you know. It's just basically what you do with the animal, basically what you do. You know it's—it can cost you cheap and it can cost you expensive.

00:41:03

SR: What about a buffalo? That must be some work?

00:41:05

RB: Buffalo, the same thing—about the same as a calf you know, whatever a calf costs. I charge that about the same thing as a calf 'cause they—like another thing, if they want to make some sausage and they throw the pork in there, depends what you want to add on, you know. Make you what you want to do, you know. Some things can cost. Some people come here and it costs them real cheap. Some people come here and it costs them real expensive, but like I—.

00:41:30

SR: But it sounds like that's the bread and butter of your business, is processing animals—not necessarily selling the boudin.

00:41:37

RB: Correct. That's my main business, yes. Oh yeah. It's—I have to say that's my number one business. Yeah right.

00:41:45

SR: How early in the morning will people come in for boudin?

00:41:50

RB: Some of them come in about 7:00; some, like on Saturdays, sometimes at 6:30 in the morning, 6 o'clock, they're up and—. I had—I used to have my customers come in at 6:00 in the morning.

00:42:02

SR: Wow.

00:42:01

RB: Oh yeah.

00:42:04

SR: Do you ever take a vacation?

00:42:07

RB: Oh yeah [*Laughs*], lots of them.

00:42:10

SR: And where do you go?

00:42:11

RB: We got—I camp. I do camping and everything and we go, like we tried that for the first time this year; I tried it for the first time, me and my brother tried it for the first time. We took off for the 4th for eight days. We took off. We had never done that in—it was usually he would take off or I would take off and—but the employee situation was getting so bad we didn't have nobody for employees. I said, *Well, we're going to take a vacation.* And then in the summer months what we do, he takes off for one weekend, and I take weekends. We take three or four days on weekends you know, but we do take off.

00:42:46

SR: So when you—when you both took off for eight days, did you shut the store for a while?

00:42:49

RB: I shut down all day.

00:42:52

SR: And what did your customers say about that?

00:42:54

RB: *Have a good time.*

00:42:54

SR: Oh?

00:42:56

RB: They know we work. They know we work over here. We do a lot, we do a lot of work. We do—we do work hard, but they understand and they came—when we opened up they were coming back. That’s it.

00:43:11

SR: What is the age difference between the two of you?

00:43:15

RB: Three years.

00:43:15

SR: Oh okay.

00:43:16

RB: Yeah. And then I have a sister that, she’s about five years apart. I have a sister; she didn’t get involved in the business.

00:43:23

SR: She never worked in the business?

00:43:26

RB: She had a husband that worked in the business, but we—she lost him, so we didn't try that no more. *[Laughs]* So we just cut that off.

00:43:34

SR: What about, tell me how Breaux Bridge has changed since you were a kid.

00:43:40

RB: Tremendously, unbelievable. When we moved here, as you can see—well you can't. When we moved here, I'll say 32 years ago, from I-10 to over here, that was cane fields. Now they got subdivisions; they got housing; they got—we was the only people back here. And when we wanted to build in that day, we wanted to build in town so we could be in town, but the town was so small you know. It was. But they wouldn't let us, That's when the town was kind of starting to grow. So when we moved out from the town where we were at, the guy wanted to sell that place. And when we were moving out we wanted to buy a place in town, but we couldn't because it was a city ordinance that they had come up with: that no animals—cattle and pigs—in town. So we couldn't get in town. So we had to move to the country. We adjusted to the country, where we're at now, and now it's a city. And that was 33 years ago. This is the city now, where we're at, so I'm not moving. *[Laughs]* They can come up with any kind of city ordinance. I'm not moving. I was here.

00:44:56

SR: So is this, so are you grandfather claused in?

00:45:00

RB: I don't know if I'm grandfather cloused in, but I know I'm here, and I was here before them, so they're going to have to—in my opinion, I think I'd be grandfather cloused in 'cause I'm here.

00:45:08

SR: So the place that your mom bought in the '70s, that was in town, the location?

00:45:15

RB: Right. Right in the middle of town. You can see it when you go, if you go back through town you're going to see it when you pass in front of Wal-Mart, and you pass in front of the old Wal-Mart and you look to the left, it's still up. It's still there.

00:45:29

SR: Is there a sign or anything?

00:45:31

RB: It's called the Old Sugar Mill Restaurant right now, but it's right in the middle. That—that was in the city limits in them days. Now if you go back through town, you're going to see the difference. You're going to know what I'm talking about.

00:45:47

SR: What about, I know that this is now like the crawfish capital of the world, Breaux Bridge.

00:45:52

RB: Right.

00:45:52

SR: Did you grow up eating boiled crawfish?

00:45:54

RB: All the time. I boiled my crawfish all the time. I love it. I love my crawfish, oh yeah.

00:46:03

SR: Boiled, huh?

00:46:03

RB: Oh yeah. I just eat it boiled. I don't eat it no other way. Yes.

00:46:07

SR: Can you tell me your parents' names?

00:46:10

RB: Dorothy, Rodney and Dorothy Babineaux, yeah.

00:46:15

SR: Oh so you're a junior, that's right. You said that. And—sorry, I lost my train of thought there. What kind of people did she buy the place from?

00:46:31

RB: Some good people. They were very nice people. They helped her the whole time that she was working there. They stayed there and after they—even after we bought the place they stayed with her to make sure, to show her how to run the place and everything. They stayed with her, and that—that woman is still alive today.

00:46:49

SR: Oh really?

00:46:49

RB: Oh yeah. She's not doing too good, but she's still alive, yeah.

00:46:52

SR: And what about when you were growing up, did you have friends who also—whose parents also did this kind of work? Were there more slaughterhouses at that point?

00:47:03

RB: Yes, I had some friends of mine. They were the Champagne's. They had a slaughterhouse, but when that meat inspection kicked in they—he got out. He didn't want to put up with it.

00:47:15

SR: No?

00:47:15

RB: No, they were—they just didn't want to put up with all that stuff, you know? But we fought it out. We took it out. And just, you have to do that.

00:47:26

SR: How many slaughterhouses are there like, let's say in Breaux Bridge?

00:47:31

RB: One. You're sitting in it. From here to Youngsville to Morgan City to Jeanerette, and from here to Sunset, Opelousas—well Opelousas has got one—and Cecelia area. And then they have one in Carencro. That's it. And there's one in Abbeville, and that's it.

00:48:00

SR: So you're saying there's one in Jeanerette, or there isn't?

00:48:04

RB: Uh-um, he shut down. He shut down the one in Jeanerette, yeah, but that's how far we go back. I just came from over there picking up cattle.

00:48:12

SR: So people will call you and ask you to come pick up their cattle?

00:48:15

RB: Definitely, yeah. Oh yeah, yeah.

00:48:18

SR: And then do you deliver the product?

00:48:20

RB: No, no, no. They, oh yeah, they got to come get it. That's too much. It—it costs enough already to do it, so they got to come get it, yeah.

00:48:26

SR: Yeah. And what about, do you know anyone else who makes the red boudin?

00:48:31

RB: A guy in—I can't think of the town right now, but I know there's one other person that makes it, and he's on—like in the Youngsville area back there. I think he does, yeah. I think so. I think that's where he's at.

00:48:49

SR: Do you ever eat anybody else's boudin?

00:48:52

RB: Oh yeah, every time I go somewhere. *[Laughs]*

00:48:53

SR: Yeah?

00:48:53

RB: Oh yeah, I try them out. You got to try them out.

00:48:58

SR: And compare?

00:48:58

RB: Uh-hm.

00:49:01

SR: All right. Well I'm pretty much done with my questions, unless you can think of something I should have asked that I didn't?

00:49:05

RB: Oh no, you passed through it good. You did a good job. *[Laughs]*

00:49:09

SR: Well so did you. Thank you for your time. I really appreciate it.

00:49:12

RB: All right.

00:49:15

[End Babineaux's - Boudin Interview]