ROCKY SONNIER

Bayou Boudin & Cracklin'—Breaux Bridge, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 1 hour, 7 minutes
Project: Southern Boudin/Gumbo Trai

[Begin Rocky Sonnier-Boudin Interview]

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Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Sunday, September 9, 2007. I'm in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana with Mr. Rocky Sonnier. —And I would just like to ask you, to start out, to tell me your full name and your birth date.

00:00:23

Rocky Sonnier: My name is Rocky Sonnier, and my birthday is September 29, 1958. I'm 49 years-old. I'm almost—I'm going to be 49 this month, yeah—not pushing too much.

00:00:36

SR: And so early happy birthday to you.

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RS: All right, thank you.

00:00:44

SR: Let me just start off by asking you, can you tell me the name of the place where we are right now, and kind of explain the business to me a little bit?

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RS: Okay, the name—the actual name of it is Bayou Boudin & Cracklin', and then we call it Bayou Cabins also. It's called Bayou Boudin & Cracklin' and Bayou Cabins. We started out with just Bayou Boudin in 1987, and after about three years or something one of my buddies had a little cabin. He was going to make a houseboat with it, and he never did do anything with it, and I asked him if we could just take it over here and if he wasn't going to use it, we were going to use it. And that's how we—we started with the cabins, and that was in '93, so—.

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SR: Where was the cabin—your friend's cabin?

00:01:29

RS: That cabin was—actually was in Breaux Bridge at—it was the office of Hebert's Creamery, the first—the only creamery Breaux Bridge ever had. And the creamery closed, and then the daughter of Mr. Hebert, Marcel Hebert's daughter, Mary Lynn, made a little dollhouse with it for their little daughter. And then her husband wanted it out their yard, and he gave it to one of my buddies, Tony Hebert in Poche Bridge, about six miles north of here. So he moved it over there, and then he started—he started working on it, but he didn't do nothing with it after two years, and then I asked him to move it. And he said, *Well I gave it to your brother-in-law* **[*Laughs*]**. And so I asked my brother-in-law, I said, *You got that cabin?* He said, *Yeah*; he said, *I got it—I did some dirty work for Tony*. He said, *You want it? I'm going to go bring it to you.* So he came and he brought it and set up over here, and that's how we got started with the cabins.

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SR: That cabin has had a lot of lives then. **[*Laughs*]**

00:02:35

RS: Yes, it has, and it has a long life left to live, I believe, 'cause it's all cypress, and all the doors are handmade in it, and that's—that's the one that Hank Williams, Jr. stays in there—Bocephus—the Cajun cabin. That's his cabin. He likes that one.

00:02:53

SR: Which one is that?

00:02:54

RS: It's—it's the one with the little red roof. It's the first cabin—we call it the Cajun cabin, and like I said the bed is handmade, the doors are handmade, and in the bathroom we put some wallpaper, some newspaper on the door to—like they used to do in the old days just for information and stop that wind from coming in. But the newspapers are from 1945, and they got some good interesting stories in there.

00:03:19

SR: Hmm. Well I stayed in the Honeymoon cabin once, which has a screened-in porch. I guess all the cabins—how many cabins are there now?

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RS: Right now we have 11, what's open, and then we just moved one somebody gave us. It was built in 1948. It was down—up the bayou from here in Parks, which is about eight miles from here. And matter of fact the front of it was facing the bayou, because that was the road. They didn't have any roads back then; the bayou was the road. And we moved that one over here, and it had a back addition, and we cut the back addition off and we moved it away from it, and we're going to make that a cabin. And then we just moved another little washhouse in, and that kind of—we have a circle of cabins starting on the bayou. We have nine on the bayou, and then we curve going up the hill, and then that's going to be two—the old cabin with the mud and moss in the walls, the *bousillage* which they call it, is going to be two cabins. And then the back of it, which was a kitchen—that will be a cabin also. And then we got another one coming up the hill and got two—the old washhouse, and that's going to be a cabin. So when we finish those three, which are really four because we got two of them in one, it's going—we'll have 15 of them. And that completes our little circle, and we going—that's going to be like our retirement or whatever. That's the easiest—easier money than working the boudin and the crackling and hogshead cheese-—that's all working here. And once those cabins are finished, it's kind of—runs itself, you know what I mean. You just need to talk to the people and cook them breakfast and stuff like that.

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SR: What was that—let me go back to a word that you said that I didn't recognize. I think it was in French—*bousiage?*

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RS: *Bousillage.*

00:05:11

SR: What is that?

00:05:12

RS: The *bousillage* is the—what the Cajuns used to use for insulation. They'd go by the bayou and they would dig a little—little slew like just with a shovel, just something that the water come pouring in, and all the clay—all the dirt over here—well, or clay you could call it—. Hundreds of years ago, 200 or 300 years ago, the Mississippi actually was—ran this same course as—and that's where the red mud is from, the Mississippi. Well to get back to that, they would—you'd dig a little trench with a shovel and let the water come from the bayou, and you'd just start scraping up the mud and just rolling it up and make like a clay with it. Actually, they had the little kids just standing in there just stepping on it with their feet just to keep it—you have to play with it to just get it the right texture. Then they would put horse hair in it and Spanish moss. They gave it like a—they'd pull it together like you would do like a fiberglass today or something. And then when they'd get it to the right texture, the houses were all—they was always framed up with cypress 'cause cypress wouldn't rot, and the termites wouldn't eat it 'cause it's so dry of a wood. And in between the two four-by-fours in your walls, you'd have some—I guess stick-sized pieces of wood that they would whittle out and go up between the two four-by-fours in the walls at different sections and like—each maybe like 12 feet apart. And then when they had that mud to the right consistency, they'd hang it over the little sticks and work their way up. And when it was—they finished, it would all be real smooth and—and it would

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really make a wall as hard like concrete after it dries. And then they would make some—get some lime and they would whitewash for looks and to keep the bugs from coming out. But that one's 159 years-old, and it's like hard like—still hard like concrete. And when they moved it and none of it fell off.

00:07:21

SR: Really?

00:07:20

RS: So that's some good stuff.

00:07:22

SR: It makes you wonder if they should still be doing it that way.

00:07:24

RS: I know, I know, and during the day when we're working in the cabins it's hot now, you know, shit, it's 102-degrees. And you walk in that cabin, and one's always the coolest one 'cause of that insulation.

00:07:39

SR: It kind of reminds me of adobe, the adobe houses in New Mexico.

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RS: Probably, you know it's all the same—what you call—what's the word I'm looking for? The same **[*Laughs*]**—the same stuff.

00:07:53

SR: Yeah, huh, that's fascinating.

00:07:55

RS: Yeah.

00:07:55

SR: And so you have—well tell me about the bayou that—you need to pause? Okay—about, what's the name of the bayou that this is on?

00:08:05

RS: This is Bayou Teche. It actually starts about 25 miles north of here and starts at the ditch in Port Barre, and then it flows through Leonville, Arnaudville, Poche Bridge, Breaux Bridge, Parks, Saint Martinville, New Iberia, and then it dumps into the little Atchafalaya in Morgan City, and then it goes and it dumps into the—the Gulf of Mexico.

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SR: Do people still use it for transportation?

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RS: No, not anymore. A matter of fact they used to have all the drawbridges ‘cause it used to be a main waterway years ago, but they haven’t—they did away with the drawbridges, and they just got some regular bridges but don’t open. So no, it’s not used for transportation. And Teche, the Bayou Teche — Teche is the, an Indian word for *snake*. Just a real curvy bayou—Teche is the Indian word for *snake*, so that’s why it’s called the Teche.

00:09:11

SR: And do people use it for recreation, or do you? Do you ever go on it in a boat or anything?

00:09:15

RS: Yeah, we have a little boat and they got some real nice homes on the bayou. Years ago you used to didn’t want to live on the bayou ‘cause that’s where the poor people lived, and now that’s where everybody wants to live. But they got some beautiful homes on the bayou. We used to have a boat and keep it in the bayou, but we needed—the bayou, so it’s a muddy water and it gets our boat all stained, which is easy to clean, but you don’t want to have to clean it. One day we’re going to get it so we can—it’s a 1976 boat that we paid $1,500. It’s in—it’s in mint condition, or it was. We need to get it back in mint condition, but it would be nice to keep it there, but if you could raise it out the water and jump in it when you want, it would be nice. But they had a few boats in the bayou yesterday I noticed, yeah.

00:09:59

SR: And so tell me about the business that isn't the cabins—the food end of your business.

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00:10:06

RS: Okay, the boudin and the crackling. We got a place down the road. We used to go in there and get boudin and crackling, and it was always full of people, and we said, *Well let me get some boudin and crackling.* And we'd eat it and say, *Man it's—it could be better than that.* I said, *Well they're making some money with all the people in there*, but then actually we said, *Man we could make it better*. I said, *Let me go talk to Miss Lun Thibodaux*. She's the lady with—had the slaughterhouse—32 years had the slaughterhouse.

00:10:40

SR: What was her last name?

00:10:43

RS: Her name—Miss Lun Thibodaux. I don't know her real name. Lun is her nickname.

00:10:47

SR: Like L-u-m-b?

00:10:48

RS: L-u-n--Lun.

00:10:48

SR: Oh okay.

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RS: And her husband was Lee Thibodaux. They were friends of my mama and daddy. And so I said, *Maybe we'll open up a little place*. I said, *You going to come show me how to make some boudin?* She said, *Sure, I'll come show you*. And she showed us—come and showed us how to make—gave her recipe that she—we figured if she sold it for 32 years, we could sell it for a little while too, you know. And she came over here and she helped us with the recipe. We make it with some boneless pork picnics. We get about 50 pounds of the boneless pork picnics and then use like 15 pounds of pork liver; you boil that together, and you boil it for about two hours. And after you boil it you take it out your pot and you keep—your broth that it was boiling in, you take it out the pot and then you—you put your meat on one side in your big grinder, and then you go to—you put your liver on one side of the grinder. Then you get your meat and you take the—we take the little fat on the meat off, and you put it with the liver and you grind the liver and the fat together—small, real small. And then we grind the meat bigger, and then we mix that with 40 cups of rice and 10 pounds of onions, and we have our red pepper, salt, and a little paprika for color to make it a pretty color, and you mix it with the broth that was—you boiled it in; you mix it up by hand with the big black gloves. And then we put it in our water cylinder, and we put it in some natural casing. We making it with natural casing, and we make like 100 pounds in a batch. And that's our boudin recipe.

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SR: And how often do you make that?

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RS: We make it like three times—we make like 400-pounds a week, and then we make 200, and then—that's the regular boudin, which everybody has. Breaux Bridge is known as the Crawfish Capital of the World, but it should actually—they make more boudin I would think than any other parish in Louisiana. There's 62 parishes, 64 parishes. And you got, Poche's probably—I would guess he sells about 5,000 pounds a week. He's been—and he's got a big commercial outfit. Baudin's Acadiana Farms Sausage Kitchen, they sell like 7,000 pounds a week. We sell like 500 pounds. Charlie T sells like 500 or 600 pounds. Champagne's sells about 1,000 pounds. That's right here in Breaux Bridge with the 7,000 people living in it, you know. So it should be the Boudin Capital of the World, really.

00:13:36

SR: Who is eating all that?

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RS: Beats me. They—they love the boudin. A lot of—some of these are commercial, and they go on the road and they sell them at the Winn Dixies and all the big stores. Some of them even go to Texas and sell that. And we got a new boudin we started making called white bean and tasso boudin. If you like white beans, you going to like that. And we make a seafood boudin; it's shrimp, crawfish and crab, and that's some fine eating stuff too now. And that's the three boudins that we make.

00:14:12

SR: Tell me about the white bean and tasso.

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RS: Well we get some—you cook—you get your old Camellia dried beans and you put them in a big army pot. I think maybe we—maybe eight pounds—no, 16 pounds of them, and with your onions. You put your water, your onions, and your bell pepper and your garlic and your salt, and you fry your bacon and you put it in that pot. And you just boil the beans for about four hours, and it's actually just white beans **[*Laughs*]** and we mix it with rice. It's white beans with rice, and then you mix it up and you put it in the casing, so it's white bean boudin. It turns—it's a boudin once you put it in that casing, and it gets that name for that.

00:15:01

SR: And so the meat in there is tasso and bacon?

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RS: Tasso and bacon and the—and the white beans, and that's it.

00:15:09

SR: I'll have to try some of that. I wanted to go back for a minute before I forget. Miss Lun, did she have a commercial business?

00:15:18

RS: No, it was a slaughterhouse. It was just they—they slaughtered their own pigs and cows and lambs and stuff like that—the goats. But she—they'd make the boudin and sell boudin, and her

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husband would cook the cracklings, and they made the hogshead cheese. And then she—she's the one that gave me the recipe for the hogshead cheese too. And then the crackling, they had just about seven old guys that would all want to show us how to make it, and they all had a different recipe. You know them Cajuns—nobody wants—they all got to do something different. And then, but we ended up—his name is Claiborne Hebert; he's from Abbeville. He used to have the racetrack, the bush track in the back, and the rooster fights, and he had a slaughterhouse. And my wife, Lisa, worked at a doctor's office in Lafayette and he was a patient over there. And every time he'd go for a checkup he'd bring her a little bag of cracklings. And I tasted those and said, *Oh those are good.* And I said, *That's the ones I like the best*. And she—she called him and asked him if he would show me how to cook them. And he said, *Oh yeah, tell him come tomorrow at 4 o'clock*. So I went over there and he showed me how to cook them and—which was a big, big help 'cause cracklings and pralines, that's probably the two hardest things to cook 'cause they all cook different every time. But, and everything is by temperature. Especially the pralines, but the crackling and [pralines] are the two hardest things I would think they have to cook.

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SR: And what is—well first of all, what did you like about his cracklings especially?

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RS: His crackling were kind of, they were light and they were long. Everybody—nine out of ten people cut them or—nine out of ten people cut them into little squares, you know maybe like one and a half by one and a half or something like that. And they—most of them used the pork

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bellies, which is uncured bacon, and he used the ham skins. And he'd get them in a box like a chicken box, them waxed boxes I guess—they're about 30 inches by 14 or 16-inches. And then when they would cure hams they would take that—the fat off of the ham, the fat and the skin, and then that's when you buy the hams in the store. But anyway, then they would stack them in a box on top of each other, and when he cut them he just would take a big block of the—take the whole box frozen, and then he cut it one time sideways and they were—they were long. And instead of being in the—cut them about an inch, and they was real long. And then when you put them in all frozen, once you cut them sideways one time, and they'd start breaking up in the box, and he'd show me how to cook them. And then when you would—when they would start floating—after about an hour and 45 minutes they start floating, and they start breaking their skin, and then we called them little eyes. They start blistering and just start doing that, and you get about half of them to do that and you take them out of the hot grease. And then you just strain your grease and, but you leave your grease go—leave it on. And then the hotter the grease gets they going to start making some little white bubbles on the top of the grease, and your pot is going to eventually fill up with the little white bubbles and be solid white. And then the hotter it gets, then they start leaving. So when the bubbles start leaving, about halfway—that's how he gave me the recipe, halfway, but I put a thermometer in the pot. I wanted to check what the temperature was when it was halfway. You throw them back in that pot, which takes about 25 minutes for that—the bubbles to get halfway, and when they get halfway that—the crackling that you took out of there was cooled and that grease was hot, and—over 450-degrees. And when you take those cold cracklings and you throw them in that hot grease, they go to the bottom and they would pop up like popcorn. And then you'd take them out and you'd just sprinkle them with salt

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and they were real light and—a lot of—a lot of people like those cracklings. We shipped a lot of crackling like that though all over.

00:19:43

SR: And so that's exactly how you make it? That's how he made it?

00:19:48

RS: That's exactly how we make them.

00:19:51

SR: And is that common for someone who—he had a business when he showed you?

00:19:56

RS: Yes.

00:19:57

SR: Was that common for someone to share their recipe [with] another business?

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RS: Yeah, because we was—Abbeville is about—down the road here, you take a left at the end of the road and go about—it's about 25 miles, you know. We're not in no competition, you know. He was just a nice old man to do it. I guess some people wouldn't do it, but I'd—I'd give it to people if they want to know too, you know.

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SR: And so those ham skins, has that—they've been cured already?

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RS: They've been cured. Now we having trouble getting the ham skins. As a matter of fact, while we talking right now there's about three months we not cooking those kinds because we can't get the ham skins. Sometimes you get them and it's—you know, sometimes you get a salt-cured ham, a honey-cured ham, or stuff like that, and lately we've been getting like the all salt-cured ham and it's so salty you couldn't eat them. And then when you take them out the first time—you know I told you when—about when they were most cooked they start blistering their skin? They would never do that, and we'd throw them back in the grease and they wouldn't—wouldn't pop, so we'd throw a lot of cracklings away because of that problem. So we started—when we started back working on the cabins, it's a lot of work to cut the cracklings and clean up, so we got the pork bellies which almost everybody cooks now, which is—it's really considered the traditional cracklings, and we started cooking those. They come all cut—excuse me; I'm a yawning—.

00:21:29

SR: That's okay.

00:21:29

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RS: They come all cut up, and they're still good, but it's just a different crackling. But that's where we're at now on our cracklings.

00:21:38

SR: So it was just maybe the salt content of the salt-cured ones?

00:21:41

RS: Exactly. The salt—the salt curing, and then sometimes when we first started we have different problems. Cracklings, like I said, it depends a lot what the hog eats too. It's a big thing where you can cook—we cooked—oh Lord, I don't know how many batches of crackling, but anybody that cooks crackling can tell you every batch is not going to come out the same way. You know what I mean? It's just something which you got to cook; it doesn't cook itself. You can't just put it on and let it cook, you know. It's kind of rough.

00:22:17

SR: And so do you—why do you do it? Do you make—is there a good profit off of crackling, or just demand?

00:22:25

RS: It's just a—shew, we started with boudin and crackling and let me tell you something. If we had to open up another store it probably be a Bayou Sunglasses and Batteries or something like that. **[*Interruption]***

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00:22:46

SR: Okay, we're back. Yeah, you would maybe open up a Sunglass Hut on the bayou?

00:22:50

RS: Yeah, batteries and sunglasses. Yeah, crackling is so hard to cook. And we just have it for our customers now, and—. But I would guarantee if you—if you hire somebody to come in and tell you what you're supposed to be selling the stuff for—you know them experts that say you got to make this much profit on that. Especially all we sell over here is boudin, crackling, and hogshead cheese, white beans and tasso boudin, and seafood boudin, pralines, and that's it. People got to come over here just for that, and they selling boudin in every little store. So when you going to go to the store and buy you some milk and stuff like that, you see boudin there. It might not be the exact boudin of what you want, but it's there—they sell it, you going to get it instead of going to a shop and two or three places. You know what I mean? But you would come over here—they come over here just for boudin and crackling. It's—but if they come and they tell us how much we'd have to sell it for, them experts—shew, it would be over $20 a pound. And you couldn't sell no crackling for that.

00:23:51

SR: What do you sell it for?

00:23:51

RS: Eight dollars and ninety-five cents a pound. I will go right now—we been serving crackling and boudin and that stuff there for, it's going to be 20 years this December—to get our 15 cabins

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done. And we would like to just do cabins ‘cause man, **[yawns]** we getting wore out. We started working—I used to wake up at 4:00 and we work—come over here at 5:00 and work ‘til 7:00 seven days a week. We did that for eight years, and then we ran ourselves in the ground. And we don’t have—it’s not like we make all kind of money. We just—everything just paid, and then the money that we do have—we don’t have any—we have a little bitty savings, like $8,000. We put everything in the cabins, so that’s our savings right there. So we’ve been doing it 20 years, and then my wife worked at a doctor’s office like for 16 years. We both been working 30 years already; I started working in the oil field at 17 with the minor’s release—.

00:24:53

SR: With a what?

00:24:54

RS: A minor’s release. Your mama and daddy got to sign so you can go to work—release you. And we both been working 30-some years, 32 years, and this is still going to be work over here but it won't be—shit, you get over here at 5 o’clock and you’re like on a schedule. You got to hurry up and cook this; they got to be ready for 7 o’clock. People start coming at 7:00. You need to clean it up, and you got to get it ready for breakfast at 9 o’clock. When you come in and work 10 hours a day, you really working 10 hours a day. And we take—take a little lunch break for about 15 minutes, but it’s a hard job. I wouldn’t recommend anybody getting into the business, to tell you the truth. **[*Laughs*]** Just being nice.

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SR: Well I've stayed here and, I can't—I definitely couldn't tell by how friendly and welcoming you were that you were worn out.

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RS: Yeah, but hey, I might be too tired to get mad. **[*Laughs*]**

00:25:44

SR: Maybe that's it.

00:25:47

RS: Yeah, no.

00:25:47

SR: And so—well, one thing that I noticed when I stayed here is that there's definitely demand for your product, and I was shocked to see people buying crackling and boudin for breakfast.

00:26:00

RS: Oh yeah. Well most of it—that's when they eat it, mostly for breakfast. Most cracklings are sold before 10 o'clock in the morning. And we been shipping a lot of crackling and boudin 'cause—you had asked about that show *Dirty Jobs*; it's show on TV on Discovery Channel. They called over here one time and they asked if they could come and film *Dirty Jobs* over here, and I said, *Now look*, I said, *I never saw that show, and we sure don't want y'all to come over here and film and—like them little—that Hilton, Paris Hilton, and that other little Richie girl*. I

said, *We sure don't want that over here.* He said, *No we do a dirty job, an interesting job*. And I said, *Yeah, but that's some food*. I said, *You don't want to have—call that a dirty job*. Well they said they going to send us a little video of some of the shows. But 30,000,000 people watch that show nationwide. And we got a lot of—we had like, shit, 700, 800 orders from that show. And it started the first—this show the last July was when the first time they showed it, but they repeated it about 15, 20 times, and you can tell every time it's repeated 'cause they get some emails on the internet and get a few more orders.

00:27:24

SR: And so what did they film you doing?

00:27:26

RS: They showed us cutting the crackling one day, clean—I told them that was the dirty job: cutting the crackling and cleaning up. And they showed us cutting the crackling with my little son, Baylon. And my little godchild, Eli, really wanted to be on it, so that's why we kind of really did it. And they did crackling; they cooked the crackling and they filmed the day doing that, and then the next day they showed us making the boudin. And they spent two days over here making boudin and crackling. Matter of fact they just had a party, I think in San Diego—it's somewhere in California, maybe San Francisco. It starts with an 's,' and they ordered a big bucket of crackling for their party. **[*Laughs*]**

00:28:14

SR: The show people did?

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RS: Yeah, it's the crew at *Dirty Jobs*. And we put the TV on this Monday, me and my wife I was flicking through them TV channels, and there—they showed him on the porch—his name is Mike Rowe. Him and his cameraman, it was just showing different clips from some of their best shows or—I didn't get the name of that segment, but it was a lot of different ones put together. And this part they hadn't shown on our episode, but they showed him eating—he had a big can of crackling, eating them crackling on our front porch. And I said, *Look, there's Bayou Boudin*. And they showed him eating the crackling and stuff like that, and he said, *This is on the Atkins diet*. He said, *I understand they got a lot of pretty women in Breaux Bridge—beauty queens would eat crackling*, so—.

00:29:03

SR: That's funny.

00:29:04

RS: Yeah, it was free advertisement.

00:29:04

SR: Did you make blood boudin for that show?

00:29:09

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RS: No, we didn't. And the blood boudin, you can't make it unless you have a slaughterhouse. They don't let you transport the blood, which I guess that's a pretty good thing, huh.

00:29:19

SR: Yeah.

00:29:22

RS: But blood boudin, just the—they cook, boil the meat the same way—stuff I told you. Get the rice; they put it in the bucket, and what they do, they just cut the throat of the pig and let the blood drip into the bucket. And then you take the bucket and they pour that in the rice and the meat—what's all cooked—and that's what their broth is. But I think in France they call that *boudin noir*, black boudin. But I don't—I think it's just meat and blood; they don't have the rice. But it's called *boudin noir*. That's the blood boudin.

00:29:56

SR: What about, so the cutting of the crackling is the hard part. What do you cut it with?

00:30:03

RS: We cut it with a meat saw, but years ago I remember Joe Boudreaux—one of the old men that showed me how to cook out of the seven of them, Joe Boudreaux was an original crackling cook. He was getting his crackling for eight cents a pound he told me. And his—when the kids would get off the school bus they'd go cut crackling at nights and go cut crackling all day long. He was the first one, and he sold a lot of—a lot of crackling right there. And he came and he was

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a friend of the family's. Matter of fact, he recently passed away—well about a year ago. And he wouldn't eat anything—he had cancer, and he called and I brang him a pound of crackling **[*Laughs*]**. He'd eat a pound of crackling by himself every two days.

00:30:49

SR: Wait, he wouldn't eat anything that had what in it?

00:30:49

RS: He wouldn't eat nothin'; that's all he ate, some cracklings, for—I think it was like six months he lived on cracklings.

00:31:00

SR: How long did he live?

00:31:00

RS: He was 87. Yeah, he was a hell cat I tell you.

00:31:06

SR: And so he was—he was cutting them by hand and he was selling them for eight cents a pound?

00:31:13

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RS: No, he'd get the skins for eight cents a pound. I don't know what he was selling them for, but probably 75 cents a pound. I'm just guessing. Now I'm—now they're $1.26 a pound.

00:31:27

SR: And so was in Abbeville?

00:31:28

RS: No, he was right down the road in Breaux Bridge. He's—remember I told you that seven old men showed me how to cook? Joe Boudreaux was one of them; he was the Breaux Bridge original cook.

00:31:38

SR: And what, I wanted to ask you: so onion is the only vegetable you put in your boudin, huh?

00:31:44

RS: Yeah, just onion and shallots—onion tops—the shallot, that's it.

00:31:51

SR: And what kind of rice do you use? What kind of grain?

00:31:53

RS: We use medium-grain rice. We—over here in Louisiana I think everybody—well not everybody, but most of them use medium-grain rice for everything. And then, well I got one of

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my buddies, he uses long-grain. But we grew up with medium-grain for some reason. But when you make a rice and gravy, you put that gravy on there, that rice is like it's—the long grain, it starts—it floats, it's like it floats. It all breaks up, but some people love that. I don't know. We just not used to eating that, and if you would use it in a boudin I guess it would—it wouldn't—it wouldn't stick firm or somethin'. It would all be, I don't know. Some people who deliver our rice, I asked that guy, I said, *You know everybody uses medium grain?* He said, *No, they got a place that just opened up.* He said, *And they use long grain.* But I don't know. They just opened up and they might switch to medium grain, or they might just close up and they might have a new head. I don't know.

00:32:51

SR: It's kind of stickier, the medium-grain.

00:32:52

RS: Yes, it's sticky, yeah, but that's how—I don't know. That's just how—what we were growing up on, and that's what all the old people use to make boudin, so I guess that's why we use it.

00:33:06

SR: What about the hogshead cheese? Do you use the head?

00:33:11

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RS: We started off with the head, and there's not much meat on the head, you know. You boil it and you just got the—like the cheekbone area. You take that off, and after that you ain't got much left except the big skull. And we did it a little while but you didn't get no meat, you know. You have to buy so many heads, and they weigh the skull too, and it was—. So what we started doing, we started buying some Boston butts, and you boil that. But it has to have some fat on it; you boil the fat too to make it gel. So we just use the Boston butts and boil it, and after you boil it you grind it up, and then the broth it was boiling in— after you grind it up—you grind it in a pot, and after you boil it you grind it up and you put it in that pot, and then the broth it was boiling in, you put that in the pot with it with some onions, and you cook it another two hours on the stove. And after it cooks two hours on the stove, you put it in like in them little square little pans, and you just let it cool overnight. And it cools and it makes it—they call it hogshead cheese, and it has no cheese product in it at all. It's not yellow. I don't know why they call it hogshead cheese, but that's the name of it.

00:34:32

SR: So again, the only vegetable in there is onion?

00:34:37

RS: The only vegetable is onion and onion tops—shallots.

00:34:40

SR: Yeah. And then you put a lot of seasoning in there. I mean—?

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00:34:42

RS: Cayenne, salt, and paprika. If you don't put the paprika it kind of stays like a gray color. And over here is hogshead cheese, but up north it's like a pâté. A pâté, I think, is just boiled meat. I don't know what a pâté is, but that's what I tell the people it is anyway. But then you heat it down, and you eat that with some—if you heat the hogshead cheese and you eat it with some—some Fritos or some crackers, now that's good. I like it like that. I don't like it cold, me. Ninety-nine-percent of it is eaten cold. But we started that like—like if we used to cater a wedding or something, you heat up that hogshead cheese and boy, they say, *What kind of dip is that?* I say, *That's some hogshead cheese.* [They say] *Oh no, you—get out of here*. Yeah, that's what it is.

00:35:31

SR: Oh I'll have to try it like that. I think when I stayed here we had like a welcome platter of different things.

00:35:39

RS: You had a welcome—your room comes with a sampler of—we call it the Cajun Platter. It's boudin, crackling, hogshead cheese, and a glass of homemade root beer; that's your platter. Not like the Hilton: no wine and cheese. Somebody signed our book, *Don't ever change your welcome platter to wine and cheese*, so we put a little comment in a brochure like that.

00:36:03

SR: So I'm sitting here enjoying your homemade root beer. You make that all the time?

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00:36:06

RS: Yeah. Oh yeah, we make that all the time. That and the—that was our treat when we were small. That or lemonade, you know. Pop cost too much money, so that's—we grew up on that lemonade and homemade root beer. Tastes good, huh?

00:36:20

SR: Yeah, it's delicious. How do you make it?

00:36:23

RS: Well we use an extract. They got three--three companies that I know of: Tex-Jar, Flavor Rich, and Zatarain's. Zatarain's is out of New Orleans. And we have a recipe we use. You could actually—it's non-carbonated, but you could—the way we make it, we just add a certain percent of it—it's point-20 on our scale; two pounds of sugar and two gallons of water—a gallon of sugar per gallon of water, and .10 extract a gallon, I guess you'd call it. But you could make—you could learn how to make it, you mix it up, but we just add water and sugar. But you could put it in some—put some yeast in it and cap it, and you put it in the attic and let it ferment. But a lot of times the bottles blow up, so we don't mess with that—the yeast. We just make it like that.

00:37:15

SR: Well it's delicious. So you had that as a kid. Tell me a little bit about your background, where you grew up.

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00:37:22

RS: We grew up right down the road here about six-miles. It's called Anse La Butte, and we had seven kids. My daddy worked in the oil field and my mama was raising us—six boys and one girl, and we all still live over here. I had one brother that died. He was 62; he died about three years ago. And all of us still live in Breaux Bridge or Lafayette six miles away, so—and we see each other pretty good. We all get along good, except one little brother but he's hell.

00:38:02

SR: He's what?

00:38:03

RS: He's hell; he's—he's bad. But everybody got some bad ones—or we might have one good one, and we might all be the crazy ones. **[*Laughs*]** So I don't know what's going on.

00:38:13

SR: Hard to tell.

00:38:14

RS: Yeah. **[*Laughs*]**

00:38:14

SR: So were you—do you know what your heritage is, where your ancestors are from?

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00:38:19

RS: Yeah. I'm—I'm thinking—I was told I'm a Creole, but you ask now—probably you ask 10 people what a Creole is, and they going to say it's a black 'cause there's the music Creole, is from the blacks. And the cooking is, Creole cooking—it's cooked with a lot of tomatoes, and that's—that's usually black people that cook with the tomatoes. And the blacks learned that—well the Creole cooking comes from the—from Haiti when they was exiled in 1776. The Cajuns did stop over there in Haiti, and that's where they got a lot of recipes like gumbo and some cooking with tomatoes and stuff like that. But my buddy told me—he's a local historian; his name is Kenny Delcambre—the definition of a Creole is a Spanish and a French marriage. And my daddy was a Sonnier; he came—his grandfather came on the boat. It was—it's a father and a son on the boat from France. And my mama was a Domingue, and her—Spanish. So my mama is Spanish and my daddy is French, so I call it Cajun, but I think I'm going to have to ask him another time. But I think I'm a Creole, but I'm not black. And they say Creole is black over here. But the true definition I was told, that's what I am. So I'm a Cajun and—from France, daddy was, and my mama from Spanish, and I do talk French. My mama and daddy, when they went to school they had to learn English. That's like Lisa's mama and daddy too. That generation there, they didn't know how to talk English. They had to learn that in school, and if you went to school and they would talk French, they would punish them. So when they was getting punished at school for talking French. They would make them kneel down, and they had a sign on them, *I will not speak French on the school grounds*. So they were humiliated. They was probably—when they talk about people being discriminated against, I would think the Cajuns was one of the first people to be discriminated against because of that. And they were called low-class 'cause they didn't know no English, and now shit, the damn—now you go somewhere and they got

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signs in Spanish and in American, you know. They need—they should learn how to talk English; they shouldn't have no other—. Why they didn't have signs for the French people in French, and then for the English people in English, you know?

00:41:09

But to get back to the French talking and speaking like that, so when they got punished at—at school, sure enough they didn't want their kids—you know you don't love nobody more than you love your kids, so you didn't want them to get humiliated and think they was worth nothing, so they wouldn't teach the kids French, and they would just talk French among the grown-ups. And so that generation really—really got close to being dissolved, or whatever the word is, or—. Cajun French is one of the very few languages what's been kept over 100 years and never written down, you know. You got some dialects in Breaux Bridge, and they got Cecilia, Saint Martinsville—all these little towns in the same parish, they got some different words for the same thing, you know. They're close, but just—but nobody had no phone; you started talking French, and whatever you was talking you was talking, but you start pronouncing it different. And then you know it take you two days to go six miles through the woods to Cecilia, so that's why all the little Frenches are a little—completely different. And there are 64 Parishes in Louisiana, and now they got probably—maybe eight of the parishes speak French, you know. And one thing what helped is the language for—helped to preserve the language is the French music. People love the music over here. And then all the music—good cultural music, and like we have—on the back porch over here we have probably about 60—we used to have a kids' jam session. If you could sing, play the Cajun accordion, the fiddle, or sing in French, they would let them play. [***Name redacted***] is the one who kind of, like she started the little jam session that I could have here. And, but it was real nice and—but it got—we used to do it the

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first Sunday of the month, and you know it's hard. It would either rain on that Sunday or—and we don't have a covered pavilion. But it lasted about two years, and man, we had some great times. We got some good videos of it, and half of these people are still playing and they—they touring all over the world, and they started off over here.

00:43:27

SR: So we're—just for the record, we're on the porch right now, and you have photos of kids playing all kinds of different instruments here.

00:43:34

RS: Uh-hm. All—we have—probably the most famous one right now is Hunter Hayes. I don't know if you heard of him, but he's going to be a household name I predict in two or three years.

00:43:45

SR: Is that your hat—the hat you're wearing? It says Hunter Hayes on it?

00:43:48

RS: Yeah, exactly. We kind of helped start him off, and friends with his mama and daddy—his daddy better 'cause I know his daddy from Breaux Bridge, and his mom is from Carencro. But we were—we were friends with Merrill Kilgore, which is Hank Williams, Jr.'s manager. And we made friends with him with some boudin and crackling and some gumbo, and we got Hunter to play on-stage with Hank Williams, Jr. And they went crazy in Lafayette with him, and they had 16,000 people. And then right after the show they asked him, can he go play in Fort Worth,

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Texas, and they had 160,000 people at the show. It was shown on TV—on national TV. I forget the name of it—*Country—Country Music Fest*. They had Travis Tritt and Randy Travis, Charlie Daniels, Wynona Judd, LeAnn Rimes—a bunch of them. And then Hank Williams, Jr. with special guest Hunter Hayes, and they played *Jambalaya on the Bayou*. And they flew us over there and they flew us back. And he was on the *Vickie Lawrence Show* after that, and the Maury Povich, and a few other shows—country music shows with Ralph Emory. And he toured—shew, he just came back from Canada. He was over there for two weeks. And matter of fact they filming him this afternoon tomorrow in—at Vermilionville, which you—it's a good place for you to go today. And they be filming him for a little documentary.

00:45:17

SR: How old is he?

00:45:18

RS: He's 15 right now, and he's got six CDs out. And he started when he was two years old.

00:45:25

SR: And what does he play?

00:45:26

RS: He plays the accordion. And he sings French. You can't hear it, but *La Porte d'en Arriere*—that was his first song he ever learned, and he learned it at two years-old. I have some pictures—a few Christmases ago his mama and daddy gave me a, like a thank-you poster, and it have a CD

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in it, and they got a picture of him when he was two, three, four, five, and six. And he's—well his CD is called—he's got a song on there he wrote at six years-old. It's a beautiful little song; he's a heck of a songwriter, I'll tell you. But when he—they gave him a little kids accordion. His grandmother, Lynette's mama, gave him a little kids accordion. It cost $20; they're made in China. But that's how he learned how to play. They had this song playing *La Porte d'en Arriere* the *Back Door*, by D. L. Menard, and they gave him that accordion, and that afternoon he had one of the verses of the La *Porte d'en Arriere* at two years-old. **[*Laughs*]** He's really a—he's a gifted—he's gifted. But he's—now he plays like, you know, they hand him the guitar, the mandolin, the drums, the piano. He plays everything.

00:46:40

SR: So you have a lot of music paraphernalia around here, photos and instruments. Do you play?

00:46:46

RS: No, I don't play, chère. I like—I love music. My daddy played the fiddle, and I like all kinds of music. We had Merle Haggard came over here eight times and every time he came he played. Hank Williams Jr. came and he—the last time he came he played 'til 3:30 in the morning on the back porch.

00:47:05

SR: Just right out here?

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00:47:06

RS: Outside under—underneath the shade trees, like he calls them. Oh that was—and that was my two best. I said, *Oh Lord, I must be getting ready to die then*. My two artists came over here.

00:47:17

SR: Wow, and you speak French, right?

00:47:19

RS: Yes, right.

00:47:21

SR: I think when I stayed here there was an older man who was here both mornings that I was hearing speaking French. Was that a relative of yours?

00:47:33

RS: Matter of fact he just left, if I'm thinking about the same one. He—we call him Handsome Harry. I don't know if you remember the name.

00:47:39

SR: I don't remember his name.

00:47:39

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RS: Let me get you a picture and see if that was him, but he just left. We have a lot of—like coffee drinkers during the week; they all speak French.

00:47:50

SR: Coffee drinking is the time to come and speak French?

00:47:51

RS: Yeah, is that him—maybe not? You don't remember?

00:47:55

SR: Yeah, that might be him 'cause I think he had like a work outfit on.

00:48:00

RS: That was probably him.

00:48:01

SR: Yeah. **[*Laughs*]**

00:48:02

RS: He comes—he just left right before you were here, and I started to tell you that—him that you were coming. But then I told him about the deal going over there at Vermilionville, so I think he's gone over there.

00:48:15

SR: He went over there? Well he—he was a character.

00:48:19

RS: Oh yeah, he loves to talk French.

00:48:20

SR: So you—you're fluent. You can speak with any of the old people that come in?

00:48:25

RS: Yes, I can. Now there's a lot of words I'll know in French, but there's a lot of words that—like all the new stuff coming out of the computer—they got a word for computer in French, you know; I mean we don't know what that is. And that—I don't know what—but I can, yeah. I could go to France and I could go to Canada for sure. Now their French is a lot closer than that real French. That real French, they roll that tongue; they want to pronounce everything perfect over there. Us, we hurry up and say what we got to say. And it—I could speak—I could go to France and Canada and get along all right.

00:49:07

SR: Yeah, Cajun French doesn't have that rolling of the tongue that much, huh?

00:49:10

RS: No, no—hurry up and talk and listen to what they got to say, and that's it.

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00:49:15

SR: And your son that—who you mentioned, does he speak any French?

00:49:19

RS: No, it's not cool for them to speak French, which is pitiful. And in fact my daughter is 15, her, and she's taking Spanish in school for an elective. But you know what? Like her mama said, which I didn't want to hear, if—if she goes into some kind of business when she works—which she better work—one day you probably going to need the dog-gone Spanish to get her by. You know what I mean? The French don't help, but the Spanish is going to help you 'cause the Spanish is—got a lot of Spanish people around, like in Texas. We're not in Texas, but—. You know what I'm saying? If you look at it at that aspect—to save the culture, sure she should have took French, but then you—you had a French immersion program in school. But shit, when the kids would come home we didn't know what the heck they were saying. **[*Laughs*]**

00:50:12

SR: Really?

00:50:14

RS: So they started back, and they did like CODOFIL put out something in Lafayette, the Council on Developing French in Louisiana or something like that, and they were teaching the Cajun French.

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00:50:27

SR: Wait, who was—I'm sorry?

00:50:28

RS: CODOFIL—it's the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana.

00:50:33

SR: Oh okay.

00:50:33

RS: Something like that—I don't know the exact—. And they was teaching them the Cajun French. **[*Laughs*]** But it's like they were coming home and speaking Spanish to us. I didn't—we didn't know all them big words.

00:50:46

SR: That's funny. So you have two children?

00:50:45

RS: Two children, Baylon is 19; he works at UPS. And my little girl is 15 in school. But Baylon has helped me over here a lot. He was working over here since he's 14, but you got to show them how to work. A lot of them don't want to work. You see, but him, he's—I'm proud he's a good worker.

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00:51:05

SR: And do either of your kids think that they want to take over the business?

00:51:12

RS: Well I don't know. My little girl, no, She's a real girl girl. My little boy is fired up on his job at UPS, but he's a good worker. He's helping me redo the cabins. I think he's getting interested in them cabins. He likes to—but he really—he's going to college, which we said we going to pay his college as long as he does good. And, but he really wants to drive a truck at UPS, and they make money. And once he gets on that truck he's going to be making $25 an hour. That's a lot of money in 19—in 21 years-old. You can't drive 'til you're 21. He's making $11 right now; he's part-time. He works at night—10:30—10 o'clock. Got his insurance all paid, you know, and once he gets on that—once he makes 21 years-old he can get him a route 'cause he—he moved up. He's—I think he's as high as he can go right now. Just waiting to get old enough, so—.

00:52:12

SR: What did you do right after school?

00:52:16

RS: Oh well I quit school and I got a minor's release and I went to work in the oil fields for Frank's Casing Crew. And worked there, and then after that I made marble—manmade marble, and I started painting and sheet rock. I had—we had our own little business, me and my brother,

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and we did that for 10 years. Then I wanted to make some boudin and crackling after that, and that's—we been here after that.

00:52:42

SR: So when you made the switch to the boudin and crackling, did the preservation of your culture come into play at all in your head? Did that have anything to do with it, or what—why did you decide to do that?

00:52:57

RS: Well I don't know. Well I used to enjoy going see people cook crackling and stuff like that, and watching them old people cook and help them, 'cause yeah. I guess it had a lot to do with that come to think about it, yeah.

00:53:14

SR: And does it now? Do you—are you aware of sort of your cultural worth?

00:53:18

RS: Yeah, because with our cabins, half of the people come from another country. And then the other half—about 30, 35-percent that's from another state, so—. And they all—people come over here in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana exactly for the food and the—and the music. So we're a big part of the attraction of Louisiana: food, the culture, and the music. Us, when we go somewhere we going to get us a big ice chest and put our food in there and vacuum pack it with the seasoning and everything, put the seafood, fill it up with ice, and when we go somewhere we

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going to cook—we just have to cook. If somebody comes over here they ain't coming to cook because they—the Cajuns got to—they know how to cook. You can give them that, so—and they like it.

00:54:18

SR: Well speaking of that, I'm also working on a project about gumbo. Do you make gumbo here at all?

00:54:26

RS: Oh yeah, we make gumbo here. We make a gumbo; we cook it. We make a "gumbo juice," we call it. We get our roux and we get—we make it nine gallons at a time in the big army pot. I think three pounds of roux—I forget what it is, 'cause I'm getting ready to make some anyway. Three pounds of roux, nine gallons of water, three—just three pounds of onions, and a pound of bell pepper; garlic. And we just boil it and let it cook real slow, get it to good boiling, and we do that for six hours. And after it cools you—you let it cool, and then you put it in the cooler overnight, and then the next day and we take it and we put it in some gallons, and we put it in the—and we vacuum pack it frozen. And we sell it like that, 'cause when you get home you can cut it open and you defrost it, and you can put your shrimp, your craw—your shrimp, crab—we use a lot of shrimp and crabmeat and oysters. You put [your seafood] in there and you heat it up and 20 minutes, you got a six-hour gumbo in 20 minutes 'cause of the juice. The trick to anything is cooking it a long time, you know. Or we have the chicken and sausage gumbo, fresh sausage and hen gumbo. That's my best.

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00:55:44

SR: Fresh sausage and hen?

00:55:46

RS: Uh-hm, that too, but I'm just telling you how we make our little juice. That's how we met Hank Williams Jr.—and Merle Haggard, with some gumbo and some boudin.

00:55:56

SR: And so that's like a concentrate—a very concentrated stock, huh?

00:56:02

RS: Very concentrated stock. That's a good way to put it.

00:56:07

SR: And your roux, do you use pre-made roux, or do you make that roux?

00:56:13

RS: We use pre-made roux. We can make a roux, but it takes so long and we got so much other stuff, and I'm on vacation right now talking to you.

00:56:22

SR: What?

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00:56:25

RS: To make a roux, you just use a cup oil to a cup of flour. That's—that's probably your best recipe right there. And then you just stir it, stir it 'til it gets to the right color, and just don't leave the stove. But they have these companies, that's all they make. We get about five gallon jugs. And some companies—Savoie's, Richard's, Kary's Roux, and Kary's to me is by far the best roux. And it's, you know—and they never miss, or you can't miss if you move it from the stove. And they got—it's all machines and it's all by temperature and stuff like that. So when you can get something at a good consistency like that, you just as soon stick with it. You know what I mean?

00:57:06

SR: So was someone in your family a cooking inspiration to you?

00:57:11

RS: Maybe my brother, if I would have to think about it, 'cause we go to his house every Thanksgiving. His name is Lew.

00:57:24

SR: His name is what?

00:57:25

RS: Lew—L-e-w—and we been going over there for, Lord, 30-some odd years, and he cooks everything for Thanksgiving. So it may be him. I don't know.

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00:57:35

SR: Your mom, was she a good cook?

00:57:37

RS: Oh yeah, my mama was a good cook. I was *difficile*. What you call that? *Difficile* in English is--?

00:57:45

SR: Difficult?

00:57:48

RS: Picky, difficult. I have another word I was looking for though. Yeah, whatever, I will think about it but it—picky, difficult. Anyway, she—me and my little sister was like that, and my other brothers just—she sometimes—a lot of times she cooked three different things in one night 'cause we didn't want to eat the onions and take the onions out. And I'm straining my gumbo with a little strainer.

00:58:16

SR: Strained what out of it? **[*Laughs*]**

00:58:16

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RS: The onions—the onions, and now everybody says that, *Somebody who used to strain the onions and now they buying the onions by the sacks over here*, but—. Yeah, she was a real good cook, and most times she'd make a good pork roast, you know. One of her specialties was salmon balls, which is not Cajun, but you talk about good. It's—get the pink salmon in a can, and you take it out and you got to take the little bones out, and you get you an egg and you crack the egg; salt it with salt and black pepper and the red pepper, and you boil some potatoes—probably about, for that can you probably boil about four potatoes—medium potatoes like a little apple or a little tomato. Boil the potatoes, and you make—after they boil real good, you mix that salmon with the potatoes and you roll them up and make a little ball and you just roll them in some flour—just some flour, and you deep fry them. Now that's good stuff.

00:59:18

SR: I wonder where—how she got that recipe.

00:59:22

RS: I don't know, 'cause salmon—salmon was cheap. They—they do it with fish, with salmon. I really don't like salmon. I tried to eat that twice, and it's so strong like a tuna, but with them potatoes it cuts it. It just—I'm kind of hungry for some right now, tell you that.

00:59:38

SR: Do you make it now?

00:59:39

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RS: Yeah, yeah.

00:59:42

SR: And so tell me—back to your hen and sausage gumbo—what's the difference between a hen and a chicken?

00:59:45

RS: A hen is a yard chicken I guess, huh, and you can cook it a long time, and the longer you cook anything—very few people—. Shew, hardly nobody cooks just the juice and freezes it when they need it, so when you cooking it, that hen is cooked and they put the flavor—when they start cooking that gumbo juice, you can put the hen and you can boil that son of a gun for about two hours in there without it breaking up. You put a chicken in there and you boil it a half-hour there, and then it don't—it all breaks up. It's—it's not pretty. It's just stringy in there. And that hen, the more you boil it the flavor comes out them bones and stuff like that; it's a much better flavor with a hen. That's why we do that.

01:00:42

SR: All right.

01:00:44

RS: And then we use a fresh sausage or a chicken sausage. I use that—my whole family does. Now you go to Ville Platte at another parish—Saint Landry Parish I guess it is—they all put smoked sausage in their gumbo. Now that's a different—completely different taste. New

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Orleans, they all put tomatoes in their gumbo. You can't have no tomatoes in no gumbo. That's not a gumbo. And they got—old people put okra in a gumbo, but that's called an okra-—a gum-bo [**French-like pronunciation]**. That's the way you say okra in French, is gum-bo, so and then that comes from Haiti. They were—that was their gumbo, and you use that—you eat that with shrimp, with seafood. Seafood gumbo is with okra.

01:01:29

SR: But you generally don't put okra in yours?

01:01:32

RS: No, we never do, but my wife does. That's her okra gumbo—her mama. They like that. I don't like the okra, me. I don't like it. I never tasted it. I told you I was *difficile*.

01:01:42

SR: You've never tasted okra?

01:01:44

RS: Uh-um, there's a lot of stuff I never ate. I'm just difficult for that.

01:01:48

SR: And what about filé? You put filé in your gumbo?

01:01:50

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RS: Filé, every once in a while, and then they got some crazy people too. They make the gumbo with just filé. And that's—that's another thing: it got to be green. Filé is actually—your gumbo there, you want a little different taste, and then you just sprinkle a little bit on it and it kind of thickens it up. But the traditional gumbo, you put your—you make your roux with your cup of flour to a cup of oil. You stir it, stir it, and when you get the pretty color you want you put your onions in and your bell pepper and your garlic, and you just mix it up in your roux. And then you put your water in there and you just let it boil. And you add your hen and your sausage, and then your—let it boil again. Cook it a long time. You cook that roux and water for three hours if you can. That's the minimum.

01:02:41

SR: With the hen in it?

01:02:42

RS: No.

01:02:43

SR: Oh, before the hen?

01:02:44

RS: Yeah.

01:02:46

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SR: And how long do you cook the hen?

01:02:45

RS: Well the hen—that—well the hen you could—you probably put him after about two hours of the boiling, and then there's a four-hour gumbo for real good gumbo.

01:02:58

SR: And when you make gumbo here, what kind do you usually make, the seafood?

01:03:02

RS: No. Well our Christmas party, we make a big seafood gumbo. My wife loves the seafood gumbo and most people—well everybody loves seafood gumbo too, but mine is hen and sausage. I just—it's completely different.

01:03:19

SR: I'm—I just remembered that when I was here, when I stayed here, I think we had beignets for breakfast that were fried in the—fried in lard, huh?

01:03:29

RS: **[*Laughs*]** Fried in hog lard, yeah. That's—I guess I can give you our recipe. It's an easy one. You go to a Winn Dixie and get some Pillsbury Biscuits—four for a dollar. And you roll them up with your little rolling pin, and you put a little slit in it, and you put them in the hot grease at 350. It takes about two minutes to fry them, and then you sprinkle them with some

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powdered sugar and they're ready to go. Or, you can put even a little—I like to put the cinnamon and the—a little bit of cinnamon in there and some powdered sugar. That's good stuff.

01:04:10

SR: That was a good way to wake up, I have to say. **[*Laughs*]**

01:04:12

RS: Well good.

01:04:15

SR: What about when—did you have any Katrina evacuees staying here after the storm?

01:04:18

RS: Yeah, we had them all—all the people was—. I got over here, shit they had about 70 people, 70 cars in the parking lot you know, and bumper to bumper. I had some parked and they were all sleeping in their cars. So some of them—two of them had been over here already from another hurricane. I said, *Y'all come help me in the kitchen*. I said, *We're gonna cook*. We cooked, I think it was 20 dozen eggs or—I said, *Come help me; we're gonna cook everybody some breakfast*. They helped us cook, they helped us clean up, and we gave them all breakfast, and after a few days people would come or they would call us or they sent us some money. We had like $1,800 people sent us from wherever they was from, you know—Michigan, California, Texas, some—a couple from Canada that didn't want to give it to the Red Cross. They said, *Y'all do what y'all want with the money. We know y'all gonna do right with it.* And anyway, we

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cooked them all some suppers, had a lot of friends that would come over here—*Let's do something. We got to do something*. I said, *Yeah, we got to do something; let's do it*. So we—we'd go buy some meat and cook. And then Tony come and he said, *Man*—. I said, *We need to get them a place to stay*. So one said, *I got a camp in Belle Rose*, and another *I got a camp in Anderson*; I got an outdoor kitchen. So in about a week we got them all out of here 'cause they couldn't afford to pay the whole thing, and we sure didn't want to charge them, but we needed to keep our business going. But we got them all some places to stay for free. And then Wal-Mart came and they rented all our cabins for two months. So that was—

01:06:01

SR: For their employees?

01:06:03

RS: Their employees, so we were lucky. Blessed. You help somebody, you get in there, it can help you too, you know. So I bought my little boy a truck when he graduated. I don't know how he would have got a truck otherwise.

01:06:17

SR: If it weren't for Katrina?

01:06:18

RS: If it wasn't for Katrina—for Wal-Mart. It's not Katrina. Don't blame it on—don't say good for Katrina.

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01:06:23

SR: Yeah. Well that's interesting. I imagine every place around here had a lot more people than usual to take care of.

01:06:32

RS: We were lucky. The ones that came over here was lucky. Well in this area, not just over here. People was helping everybody you know. We were lucky.

01:06:40

SR: Well I know I need to let you go because you're a businessman and you're supposed to be on vacation. Just let me—one final question: What is it that you enjoy most about your job? I know it wears you out, but what do you enjoy most?

01:06:56

RS: Meeting the people from all over. And they nice people. And shit, they go, *When you come over there, come, we got a free place for you to stay*. I probably know somebody in all—in every state and a few countries. One day we might take them up on that deal.

01:07:13

SR: Yeah.

01:07:13

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RS: [*Laughs*]

01:07:13

SR: I guess that's incentive for your retirement plan.

01:07:15

RS: Yeah, yeah. That would be good, huh? My wife wants to go travel, her, so we're going to bring her I guess.

01:07:22

SR: All right. Well thank you for giving me so much time. I really appreciate it.

01:07:26

RS: You're welcome. We'll go find something to eat I guess, huh? **[*Laughs*]**

01:07:30

SR: Yeah.

01:07:31

[End Rocky Sonnier-Boudin Interview]

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