JIMMY GUIDRY
[Boudin Maker]
Don's Specialty Meats – Scott, LA

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Date: October 13, 2006
Location: Don's Specialty Meats – Scott, LA
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Length: 26 minutes
Project: Southern Boudin Trail - Louisiana

[Begin Jimmy Guidry]

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Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Friday, October 13th 2006 in Scott, Louisiana, at Don's Specialty Meats. And I'm with Mr. Cole's boudin maker and meat cutter, Jimmy. Jimmy would you say your full name and your date for the record, please, sir?

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Jimmy Guidry: Jimmy Guidry; I was born January 27th 1957.

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AE: And you were just saying a minute ago, you've been in the meat business for about thirty-some years.

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JG: Thirty-two years, yes, ma'am.

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AE: Where are you from originally?

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JG: Duson, Louisiana.

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AE: Where is that in relation to here?

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JG: That's next door to Scott, actually.

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AE: And what—since you've been here a long time, what was—what was the Scott area like thirty years ago?

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JG: Well, I mean, it's grown a whole, whole lot because back then it was mostly country, and we grew up in the country, basically. That's when we really started learning how to make boudin and doing our own butchering back then.

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AE: Can you talk about that a little bit more and explain what that was like and what went on?

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JG: Well my—my parents and them used to butcher their own hogs and stuff, and I mean I pretty much grew up around that all my life. So as far back as I can remember, when I was seven or eight years old I remember, you know, taking the pig down and—and butchering it and making crackling and boudin, hog-head cheese and all that stuff way back then.

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AE: And so when did you get in the meat business, exactly, and how did that happen?

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JG: I started in the meat business just before I turned eighteen right out of high school and actually my mom was working for a—a slaughterhouse which was Leboeuf's back in—in Broussard, Louisiana, and he just so happened to need a butcher and asked my mom if I'd be interested, and that's how I pretty much got started. I was—I started on the slaughtering floor, and I slaughtered for four years and after that I got into the—the meat part of it and became a manager, you know, at a very young age. I was twenty-two years old when I first became a market manager.

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AE: Can you talk about what you learned growing up in the Cajun culture that had the boucheries and all that and how that translated into what you do now?

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JG: Pretty much so, because I mean if you—you grow up with that around you, you know, it kind of like sticks into your blood, I would—I would say, you know. So growing up in that culture and—and learning that at a very young age, a lot of people would think that's—"Ew, that's disgusting," you know, if they saw that today. But growing up with that all my life is like, you know, it came natural to me, so that's pretty much why I was interested in that—in that field.

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AE: Was there something other than it becoming—than it being natural to you and something that you grew up with—something that you particularly like about being in the meat business?

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JG: Yes, I had a real experience about wanting to learn the—the different cuts of meat and—and not only that, but the quality of meat. So through the years of—of being a meat cutter and dealing with meat, you know, for thirty-two years, you could pretty much look at a grade of meat and—and tell, you know, if it's choice or, you know, the number two or prime or whatever it is. And, you know, that was just—you know something that I wanted to learn.

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AE: And at what point of your career did you start making boudin?

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JG: I started making boudin back when I was—let's see, I started slaughtering—I was eighteen, back when I was like twenty-one years old, and I'm fixing to be fifty here in January. So it's—it's been a few years.

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AE: When you started making it, was it a recipe that was given to you, or was it something that was part of what your family used to do?

00:03:53

JG: Well, when I first started making boudin, I—we did it as a youngster, actually. When—when I was telling you earlier, during the boucheries—and I mean boudin has come a long way now because back then you—you use the cow horn or a bull horn and—and stuff it in that. Today it's—it's machinery, you know, because you—you make so much of it. But, you know, Mom and Dad had a recipe of their own, but when I came to work for Mr. Mark Cole [owner of

Don's Specialty Meats], you know, they had their own recipe, and I just followed their recipe and just make sure that everything is consistent.

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AE: Can you talk more about the—the bullhorn? Is that like you use it as a funnel to get it in the casing?

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JG: Right, the—the bull horn was—was kind of like a funnel and—and basically, you put the casing on the end of the bull horn and you use your—your two forefingers, actually, to stuff it down into the casing and it—it made a boudin. **[*Phone Rings*]**

00:04:48

AE: Can you describe a little more the—the boucherie and the process and kind of what you would do first with the hog and where boudin would fall into that process?

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JG: Actually, the first thing they did was when—when they took the hog out from the stall, you know you—you get four or five guys, they would knock it down and—and they would bleed the hog. And from there the—the women would come with a bucket, and they could catch the blood and you know, they made blood boudin back then in the day. And from there, you know, they would—they would scratch the hog and, you know, take—clean the inside out and—and naturally, take the skin and the fat off and the cracklings came from there. And the boudin came from the head, if they weren't making hog-head cheese with some of the shoulder parts of the

hog. Or should I say like—like pretty much the—the trash part of the hog was what boudin came from.

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AE: Can you talk about what is different in what you do now and the traditional boucheries?

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JG: Well, I mean, it's—it's much cleaner now because I mean, everything is done inside. You—you just do a lot—lots more of it and, you know, every—everything that we get in now is—is pretty much in a box, you know, where back then we—we did our own killings, actually, our own actual killings and—and took it from there. So I would say it's definitely easier today, you know, especially with the machinery and the tools and—and the cleanliness.

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AE: What about the part of Cajun culture that is the boucherie?

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JG: In—in—well, I don't think it's going to go way because every year they do have a boucherie here in St. Martinsville, and people get to go out there that—that are interested or, you know, just to keep the Cajun culture going. And they actually do the boucherie there in—in front of the crowd, so it's something that—that they can come out and visit and see.

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AE: Can you talk about and describe the blood sausage because Mark and I were talking about that a little bit earlier. What it tastes like and—?

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JG: Yes, the blood sausage. Like I said, when they bled the hog, they would catch the blood and—and then they would stir the blood constantly so the blood wouldn't clabber. Then once your boudin meat was cooked and your rice was cooked, when you blended in your meat and your rice, instead of adding a whole lot of boudin juice or boudin water, they would put the blood in there instead. And—and that's where your blood boudin came from. And I mean it's—it's good-tasting boudin, actually. It's—it's a different taste than the regular white boudin, but now they—you can't find that anywhere anymore because of, you know, the Board of Health purposes and—and that sort of stuff.

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AE: Are they able to make it at the boucherie in St. Martinsville?

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JG: I'm not actually sure if they do. [***To Mark Cole***] Mark, do you know if they make the red boudin there? I don't think that they—they're allowed to anymore.

00:08:03

AE: Do you think that hogs taste different now from when you were coming up and when you had the boucheries within your family and raised your hogs and then the hogs that you're processing now?

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JG: Yes, I think today the—the pork is—has much better quality to it because these—these hogs are—are grown on feed lots, and they're fed nothing but, you know, quality feeds, whereas back in the day these hogs ate grass or—or—they were slop hogs, you know—anything that your parents were going to throw away they fed it to the hogs, you know, rice bran or bread or—or anything that—that was not any good, actually. They would put it in a barrel and put water in it, and it would ferment and they would feed that—the slop to the hogs.

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AE: Okay. So let's talk about making boudin. Can you describe the process of what you do?

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JG: Yes. Actually, the boudin process starts at about four o'clock in the morning. We get here and we'll boil the meat in—in the big boiling pots for about an hour-and-a-half. And in the meantime, while the water is boiling we—we cook our rice. And after—after your meat is boiled—and it's not over-boiled because you want a good texture to it—you ground your meat up and add it to the rice with—with the seasoning. And the seasoning is always weighed and measured, so it's always pretty much consistent, you know. And it's—it's all weighed in portions, and it's mixed in portions, so like I said, you know, it's pretty much consistent all the time.

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AE: And Mark was saying that you add some of the seasoning when you're boiling the meat and also after when you're—you're mixing it all, is that right?

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JG: Yes, ma'am. We do boil it with the seasoning and, you know, the—the other spices, onions, bell peppers, all that good stuff that makes it taste good.

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AE: And how—do you use a hydraulic stuffer to stuff the sausage, or what do you use?

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JG: Yes, ma'am. We do have a hydraulic stuffer now. When we started back fourteen years ago, we had a little fifteen-pound hand-crank stuffer, and today the hydraulic stuffer will hold fifty pounds of boudin. So it makes the job a lot easier.

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AE: I was commenting earlier, when I had the taste of boudin, that it's a lot bigger link of boudin than I've had before, where the circumference is a lot bigger. Is there a preference to the size of the casing that you're using and a reason for that?

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JG: Yes, I find that the size casing we're using your boudin looks a lot prettier. It's not real fat, but it's not real skinny. I think it's a good medium-sized casing and also it's—it makes your boudin look nice, and it makes it pretty, and it's real easy to cook.

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AE: What do you think is the most important thing about making boudin?

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JG: Consistency. Consistency is—is number one, you know—making sure that your seasoning is always weighed or measured and not having ten people make your boudin. You know, if you have—keep your boudin recipe down to one or two people, I—I think you're—you'll be fine.

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AE: Now do you have somebody that's kind of an apprentice to you and that is learning how to do this one day when you might decide to retire?

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JG: Yes, ma'am, I do. We—actually we have a young guy. He's twenty-seven years old; he's been with me now for a couple years, and I just oversee everything that he does and—and make sure that it stays right and—either myself or my wife or—or—make the seasoning and it's all weighed and measured. It's in bags and ready to go—per-fifty-pound batch, so we just make sure that everything is—is put correctly.

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AE: Are there any tricks to making boudin?

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JG: Not really. Just a lot of work.

00:12:00

AE: How long will it take you to make a batch here that you make on a daily basis to serve the store?

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JG: Ma'am?

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AE: How long will it take you to make a batch of boudin from beginning to end in a day?

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JG: I would say we could run a batch of fifty pounds in about eight minutes. This morning, for instance, he made 1,400 pounds in—in three hours so—.

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AE: And that's from cooking to stuffing and everything in between?

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JG: Well that's just the stuffing process because the cooking started at four and the—the actual finish time of—of the product was at nine o'clock.

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AE: So when you were growing up—outside of the boucheries that your family would have—where were you getting boudin?

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JG: We would make our own; that's the only way you had boudin. Because back then, I mean, we had refrigerators, but a lot of people didn't own deep freezers or—or freezers as they would say now, so everybody may boucherie at least once every two weeks. If—if my mom and dad

didn't do it, then you know, her brother or sister or—or my dad's brother and sister and my aunts and uncles would do it. But every—every two weeks we were doing some type of boucherie.

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AE: When do you think all these retail markets started springing up in the area?

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JG: Actually, when—when I first started, you had a few retailers that—that were slaughterhouses, but now a lot of your slaughterhouses are dwindling down and—and it's basically just your big processing and packing plants that—that you can get quality pork from. Just the—the thing about it is a lot of young people don't want to get involved in that—that type of industry. I mean it's—it's very hard work and again the younger people think it's a real messy job, and it's like, "Oh no, we don't want to do this kind of work." And I think it's a fantastic industry, and I would really be glad to see more young people get involved in this because this—this is a thing of the future, I guarantee you.

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AE: Can you explain that?

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JG: Yes, way back then when I started slaughtering thirty-two years ago, you know, thirty years ago, butchers didn't make very much money. It was like a job like any other job, you know. But today, I mean, they have very few butchers and so the—the pay is going to have to come up to try to get these young people interested in this industry or else the industry is going to go to nothing. You won't have any, you know, qualified meat cutters, so if you don't have any meat

cutters here, you're not going to be able to actually get fresh meats because you're going to have to get it from a packing house. And by the time these stores will get it, it's going to be five days old, you know. So our culture is going to go to nothing, if we can't get these young people involved.

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AE: And I would think that it's a really important part of Cajun culture, specifically, because so much of the culture is based around hunting and—and bringing in fresh meat from—on a recreational level.

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JG: Yes, it is. I mean you—you do have some of your hunters that will go out there and—and do their own, you know butchering of—of the deer or what have you. But then again, they don't know the whole process, so they have to bring it, you know, to these—these specialty meat companies or—or slaughterhouses in order to get it processed because they don't know anything about—they know how to kill it and they know how to take the skin off, and that's about all they know.

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AE: So would you say, then, that butchering meat—what was once a necessity is now more of a craft?

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JG: It is. It's—it's like a skilled labor job now, you know. It's—and it's going to become very demanding in—in the future.

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AE: So what about your job do you say—would you say that you do particularly well that you're really proud of?

00:16:02

JG: I don't know. [***To Mark Cole***] What—what do you think I do well?

Mark Cole: Overall, you know, as far as running the meat department, as far as seeing the everyday need of making sure everything is presented well, as far as the employees, you know, overseeing them—as far as their work, overseeing the meat case—how it looks, you know, getting everything ready as far a the boudin and cracklings and overall, just watching the whole store and—and making sure everything is done right.

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AE: So you're more of a manager, too, as well as your other—?

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JG: Yes, ma'am. I've been store manager for Mark now for thirteen years. So I've been in management, like I said, approximately four years after I started in the meat industry, so I have a few years experience.

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AE: What do you like best about what you do?

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JG: I love dealing with people. And everybody is different so it's—it's just a task and it's—I guess, how would you say that—it's a—I really don't know how to say it but it's—it's a task dealing with people on a day-to-day basis, you know, and every—everyone is different, so some people you've got to give them a tap on the back, you know, and others you've got to kind of spank them a little bit **[*Laughs*]** to try to get the moving. But yes, it is a task.

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AE: And what—we were talking earlier about there not being many retail boudin places when you were growing up. What—how do you think—this is something that I'm still perplexed with after talking to Mark, how this area can support so many specialty meat markets and—and places that sell boudin.

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JG: Again, back in the day when I was coming up, everyone had their own boucheries or made their own boudin, so they were not going to go in a store and buy the product because they made their own. But now you don't have that anymore. You know, you don't hear of anybody doing their own boucheries anymore and it's—it's a great demand. It's a big demand and—and I mean it's—it's part of our Cajun culture. So now we're bringing in people from all over the world through our Cajun culture that want to taste boudin or—or you know, want to see what it tastes like or—or even what it looks like because people come in and ask you for something that don't even sound like boudin. But you know that's what they're asking you for and—and they want to taste it. So it's—it—it's a big demand; it really is.

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AE: How often do you eat boudin?

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JG: Well, after making it every day for thirteen years every day, I—I will sample it once a week or so to make sure that it's—it's got the right consistency and make sure it has enough juice in the—in the boudin to where it's not dry. Whereas back in the day I could have eaten it probably every day because I didn't deal with it on a day-to-day basis.

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AE: Can you describe how boudin in this area is different from boudin in—in Jennings and in Opelousas and other areas?

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JG: Well I guess I'm partial, but I think we have the best boudin in Acadiana, bar none. Some people like to put a lot of rice in their boudin; others like more meat. I think we're—we're pretty much equal rice and meat as far as, you know, balancing it out and—and you don't have too much rice or too much meat. And it's—it's hard to say. I mean people follow their—their recipes, I guess, that might have been let—handed down from their grandparents or, you know, their parents, and I guess they feel the same way I feel like they have the best boudin in Acadiana.

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AE: But do you think, outside of there being like family—differences in family recipes and differences in boudin from person to person, do you think that there is like a regional difference within southern Louisiana of styles?

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JG: Yes, I think—I think southwest Louisiana is—is totally different from like, if you would go just right out of the state of Texas, for instance, because they come here and they eat it and they go back home and—and try to make it. It's not a recipe that was handed down, you know, from their—their parents or their grandfathers or ancestors, should I say. And they taste it, and they try to go home and make it. And it's not a product that you can just make overnight; I mean it's—it's something that takes a lot of, you know, measuring and—and changing this and changing that until you get it right.

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AE: So can you talk about some of the other products that y'all work with here? Mark was pointing out the rabbit, that being a big seller, and alligator sausage and things like that.

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JG: Yes, we do have the—the marinated rabbits, which is a big, big seller here. We—we also do the boneless chickens, which is a big, big selling item here. You know we have different stuffings: the rice dressing, cornbread dressing, crab and cornbread dressing; we have shrimp and rice dressing, you know, the shrimp Etouffee and I mean that—that's a big seller too that a lot of people, if you go out of state, that they don't have or—or don't even know it exists. The alligator sausage I can't talk too much about because, I mean, we—we don't make it here, you know. We—we do get it processed and get it shipped in.

Mark Cole: We make the rabbit and pork sausage and the—you know, I told you about all the fresh sausages of pure pork with jalapeno, pure pork, half-and-half—half beef and half pork—chicken sausage that we make, and the other one is chicken with the shrimp—chicken and we put some shrimp in it and it has a real good flavor also. That's all the fresh sausages. And then as far as the smoked sausages, you know, we have the chicken, the pure pork, and the half-and-half also, which really sell well. And we make our own Tasso over here also.

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AE: And then the seasoning that's on all your prepackaged meat for sale, there this—I was asking Don after we were recording earlier about his—or not Don; I'm sorry, I did it, now, look at me. Mark, I was looking at your canister—about these prepackaged seasonings. What do you think is—if anything—is special about the seasonings that you use here?

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Mark Cole: I think it's the special blend; it's not over-salty. I think if you sprinkle—just cover your meat with it I don't think it's going to be over-spiced or under-spiced, and I don't think it will be too salty or under-salty. I think it's blended very, very well as far as an all-spice goes or all—season-all.

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AE: [***To Jimmy Guidry***] As a butcher, are there—are there things that you like to work with more than others, like you prefer to make the boudin or prefer to work with beef?

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JG: I love working with—with meats and trying to come up with new ideas. I do love the specialty meat part of the meat industry. I don't have a problem liking or making boudin. I like that because I grew up with that, but I do like to come up with new ideas on specialty items.

00:24:04

AE: Is there something that you have an idea about that you haven't made yet?

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JG: Yes. I do—I do have a couple of ideas that I'm working with right now. I just—I haven't put them out. I don't like to put a product out unless I sample it myself and make sure that if—if it passes my test or not, you know. And so there is a couple of things that I'm working on, yes, ma'am.

00:24:28

AE: Well is there anything about what you do that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to mention?

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JG: Not really. I mean you've—you've asked me quite a few questions about the Cajun culture and pretty much, you know, the way I grew up dealing with the boucheries and—and that type of stuff. So I think we pretty much covered it all or—or pretty much touched base a little bit on everything.

00:24:58

AE: One thing I would like to ask you, then, I'm reminded of, is in the—the older boucherie tradition that was in the families that you were talking about, putting the—the trash meats in the boudin and a lot more organ meats used to go into it, and now it's just primarily liver, can you talk about that?

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JG: The only thing that we—we use a little bit of in our boudin today is just a little bit of liver in 100-pounds. Back in the day when we made the boucheries yes, the—the liver went in, the pork heart went in, the pork kidneys went in, all your flank meat went in, you know, the head meat went into your boudin. Today, all we use is—is the pork liver and—and quality Boston butt meat in our boudin today.

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AE: And you think that's just kind of supply and demand; you can't get a hold of all those organ meats? Or is it a taste difference? Or how did that kind of devolve into being just the liver?

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JG: I think back in the day they just tried to use everything that they could, as far as making a product, you know, like the boudin. They could put the heart and the liver and the kidneys and all that and—and have a way to go with it, without throwing any of it away. It does taste differently. I find today it's—the boudin has a much better flavor because of the fact you have just quality meat going into it.

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AE: Okay. Well I appreciate you sitting here with me and stepping away from your responsibilities this morning, Jimmy. Thank you so much.

00:26:33

JG: Thank you very much.

00:26:35

[End Jimmy Guidry]

