

MATT HACKLER
Lafayette, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 33 minutes
Project: Southern Boudin Trail

[Begin Matt Hackler Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Wednesday, July 18, 2007 and I'm in Lafayette, Louisiana. Could you state your name and your birth date and what you do for a living?

00:00:13

Matt Hackler: Sure. My name is Matt Hackler. My birth date is October 11, 1976 and I'm a PhD fellow in the folklore program at UL in Lafayette.

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SR: And can you tell us what a folklorist is, or does, and how that relates to your love of boudin?

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MH: Sure. A folklorist is someone who studies traditional culture, and so it used to be that we thought of traditional cultures as those cultures which were pre-modern—people who didn't use modern technology, you know like the Amish or people who were in some way separated from modernity. But now folklorists think of folk groups as any group which has at least one thing in common. Usually they have a number of things in common. So a religious group, a group that lives in a local area, a community, people that have some sort of occupation maybe in common—that sort of thing. So my interest—the way it connects is to my interest in boudin is

that I grew up here in Lafayette and I'm very interested in the culture of this region of Southwest Louisiana. And boudin and the—is one of the foodways that makes the place so unique.

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SR: Can you tell me what your family's relationship was to boudin when you were growing up—when you would eat it? And your parents aren't from here, and so you might have sort of a unique experience, but what it was like growing up?

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MH: Sure. We never made it ourselves. Boudin for us was like a special treat kind of food. My—when I think of boudin, the memory that comes back: I remember my dad coming back every fall from a boucherie that one of the oil fields services companies, with which his company did business, would host for the men from the oil company. He worked for Pennzoil. And I remember him coming back from the boucherie with all sorts of things: he would come back with cracklins, and especially boudin, and we would sit around and eat whatever boudin he had brought, usually on crackers. **[Laughs]** That's what we did with that boudin. And then the other times that we ate boudin, whenever we were either at a festival or a fair and we bought it from a stall—a food stall—and there are lots of festivals around here, so there was plenty of opportunity to do that. Or we would buy it from a gas station on a corner if we were out and got a hankering for boudin.

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SR: Can you tell us what a boucherie is?

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MH: Sure. A boucherie—a boucherie just means a slaughter, so when we think of a boucherie around here usually it's a pig slaughter. So it would be the whole event from the sticking of the pig to killing it, cutting its throat, to using all the pig's body parts in making the foods. So boudin, cracklins, of course, the—the pork loin and all that sort of stuff, and boiling the head for hog's head cheese. It's like a whole event and it's a big social event down here. It's a traditional social event. A boucherie is a traditional social event that, you know, a group of people from one family or one community would get together and share out the food. But now in sort of contemporary Southwest Louisiana, it's an excuse for, I guess a party—a community party and that sort of thing.

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SR: And when you would eat the boudin on crackers, how did that work?

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MH: We would—well I think my dad probably—it's hard to remember who cut the boudin, but I know that we would either squeeze it ourselves from the casing onto the cracker or my dad would squeeze it out onto the crackers for us.

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SR: Okay. Did you have a favorite place when you were growing up to go?

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MH: By the time that I was at high school age, I—you know, we would—if we were going to have boudin we went to Comeaux's, which was a gas station that the Comeaux family owned where they served boudin. So by that time—that's, you know, once I was driving myself around, if I wanted to get something to eat and if I wanted boudin then I would go to Comeaux's over here on Kaliste Saloom Road. Before that—before I was driving myself around the—the only place I remember consistently getting boudin from was my dad bringing it back from this boucherie every year.

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SR: And when you were in school, was boudin something that, you know, high school kids would go get?

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MH: [*Laughs*] No. I don't think that it was a food that any of us would eat—eat socially, you know. It was—for a lot of the kids that I grew up with, the kids that I went to school with, you know this was a home food for them. I don't know that any of them made it at home, but they would associate it you know with family gatherings and grandparents and that sort of stuff. Funnily enough the [*Laughs*]*—*the thing that we all did together was we ate Taco Bell. You know, I guess we wanted to be like American teenagers all over—all over the place, you know, eating at Taco Bell. So the Taco Bell was full of cars of kids from my high school after, you know, every school day. But boudin and that sort of thing, I think it was more of something that we ate with our families.

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SR: You have an interesting story about Comeaux's. As a younger kid you had an experience. Can you tell me about that?

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MH: Sure. In eighth grade—so I was about—the year I turned 14 I was taking Louisiana history in school because in eighth grade, at least when I was in school, that was what the history subject was for you. So we're taking Louisiana history and had a great teacher. Her name was Alice Fischer. **[Laughs]** She's no longer Fischer, but she's still Alice, and she encouraged all of us to study a Louisiana product or a Louisiana industry. And so my friend and I—her name is M'liss, and she lived just down the street from me—we chose boudin making. How we chose boudin making, I don't know. Maybe we were just really hungry for boudin that day, and we chose boudin making. And the one place—and it was clear in our minds at that time, the place that you would go to watch someone make boudin, was at Comeaux's main store. They had these gas station places around town, but they had the—the main store was on General Mouton Road, which is near the University of Louisiana. And so we arranged to go there; my dad brought his video camera. We had questions we had written for our interview, and we got up at I don't know, 4:30 in the morning or something, and my dad drove us to Comeaux's and we interviewed the guy who owned the place and videotaped him making boudin for the day there. And I remember it was a really big hit. I remember thinking it was really cool—especially, you know, who doesn't want to watch a sausage stuffer doing his thing?—but I remember showing the video and presenting the project to the class at school and that they really enjoyed it. I think maybe boudin

is one of those things that we kind of take for granted, so to kind of see where it comes from, it was kind of a surprise to everyone. I know it was to us.

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SR: We went to—we went to a gas station today. You were saying that you would go to gas stations to get boudin. Can you talk a little bit about the gas station culture?

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MH: Sure. *[Laughs]* You would go to a gas station because it was, you know, convenient. Around—around Lafayette, gas stations often have a hot food counter. I don't know how it started or where it started, and it had—they have a reputation for being good. It isn't the kind of processed food; it's not like the Chevron home company sends out, you know, these little sandwiches in bags that you can heat in the microwave. It's like every gas station, if it's locally owned, would have a cook or two that would come in during the day and usually fry things. So boudin, cracklins, often plate lunches, and also things like crawfish and shrimp pistolettes, which is like a bread pocket, you know stuffed with—fried bread stuffed with like a crawfish mixture or something like that; often fried chicken and things like that too: something they could just fry quickly in the back and serve. But local people, like men who are out working and people working on road crews, and painters, carpenters, those kinds of people from construction crews would often get their lunches there because it's cheap, it's convenient and it's tasty—not necessarily healthy, but really tasty. And so boudin would be one of those foods that was really common. It's a very portable food, so you would either go there, and sometimes they had places to sit, sometimes they—you would sit in your truck or your car and eat it, and you know it was

another—those places were also places that when we got out of school, you know kids would pick up food there too. You know—so.

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SR: And that culture is still pretty strong, it seems to me.

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MH: I think it's actually getting stronger. I don't know why. I think that people have—I—you know, I often see new places opening up with sort of professional looking food service, you know gas stations with food service built into them. And I mean locally owned food service, not like a Subway built in you know a Chevron or something. But people, I guess they see it as an easy way to add profit, and it—people are so used to it that, you know I think there—there are a group of people who if they're eating on the go would naturally look for that, so we've come to expect it in Lafayette as a good place to get tasty cheap food.

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SR: So we talked about Comeaux's. We ate boudin at a couple different places today. Can you tell me what one was your favorite and—and why?

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MH: Yeah. We were thinking a lot about this earlier. So far the boudin places that we ate today, and of the boudin that I've eaten in Lafayette, my favorite is Billeaud's in Broussard. And I think that the reason I like it compared to the other things we ate today—what really set it apart was

the sort of fullness of the flavor. You could taste more of the liver, the organ meat in it, and it had sort of—the flavor seemed to have sort of layers. It wasn't a simple sort of one flavor: you bite into it and it's hot, or it tastes like meat or just meat or rice—just rice. But it seemed like there was—a little more complex. And that made it, you know, more fun to eat and so now, from now on whenever I get boudin I know that I'm going to go to Broussard to get it.

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SR: And I noticed that you don't do the cracker technique anymore.

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MH: No. I don't know where the cracker technique came from. It may have been my parents as East Texans thinking that that's what you should smush out the boudin on. It could have been because we were kids, they thought it would be easier for us to handle if it was on a cracker. They ate it on a cracker too. So once we you know—they were raised in East Texas, but all of their kids were raised in South Louisiana, so maybe we became more adept at—at eating boudin the natural way, or what I would consider the natural normal way [*Laughs*], which is just with your hands. They may still eat them with crackers. I'd be—you know I bought some boudin here today, so whenever my mom comes home and eats some of it I'll watch and see if she eats it on a cracker. She may have made it up herself; they may have made it up themselves.

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SR: It would be interesting to know.

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MH: Right.

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SR: So you—some people I've seen, and this is what I tend to do, squeeze the filling out and don't eat the casing. You eat the casing?

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MH: Yes. [*Laughs*] Part of it is because I don't—it's—that's what makes boudin so portable, so if you eat the whole thing then by the end of the meal you have nothing left. You don't have this sort of sticky gooey casing left to worry about, you know, throwing away or anything. But also I—I just feel like the whole thing is edible so you should eat the whole thing. I don't know what those casings are made of. I don't like to think about what those casings—I'm sure it's a food grade plastic or something. I know that in the old days they were cased in intestines, that they used the intestines as casing. And when I was a kid I thought that they were—I thought that I was eating intestines, but I'm sure I wasn't. I'm sure I was just eating these food grade plastic things, but I like to eat the whole thing. [*Laughs*] Maybe it's more authentic. Maybe I'm trying to kid myself into thinking that I'm eating more—I'm eating more authentically if I eat the whole thing.

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SR: Well you may be.

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MH: Maybe. [*Laughs*]

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SR: You were talking earlier too about how boudin and cracklin' tend to go hand in hand.

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MH: Yeah. You see—in fact I should have shown you today whenever we were on Highway 90, you'll see a business that advertises boudin usually—. I mean there may be exceptions to this, I'm sure there are, but I'm so accustomed to seeing it say *boudin and cracklin'*, always together. It's like those two things are—it's like having a hamburger joint without having French fries. I don't know that people—I don't normally see people eating sort of a little bit of cracklin' and then a little bit of boudin and a little bit of crackling and a little bit of boudin. You don't see that, but it's sort of like those are two products that you would always sell together. And even if those are—you would never sell one or the other, and if those are the only things that you sold in your store you would sell those two things. It's kind of a confusing way of saying it but—. But it seems like that's always the case, and maybe that comes from the idea, you know that those are both products of the boucherie and you would make them together. So it's natural that even though these people are not slaughtering their own pigs in the parking lots of the gas stations, that they're still serving the foods that they're used to having had together all their lives.

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SR: Did you ever growing up—did your parents ever buy boudin at the grocery store, just in the meat section, and cook it up at home?

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MH: No, no, they never did. My dad started this thing where he—. Yeah, I've never had boudin prepared other than by the vendor that I—like it's always hot. I've always eaten it hot direct from the vendor. Though my dad did hear from one of his brothers that boudin was good grilled, so I have had him take boudin that was prepared hot, bring it home, and put it on the grill, and that sort of made it more like—especially if you cut it into little discs, that made it more like sausage like we're traditionally used to eating, that you could stick a toothpick in and eat it off the toothpick. So that's the only alteration that I've ever made. Otherwise it was exactly like it was handed to me in the—in the waxed paper from the store.

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SR: And what about boudin balls: what kinds of places serve those, served those, while you were growing up?

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MH: Usually the same places that served boudin, so the place—the gas station at the end of my street always had boudin balls, in addition to sort of fried pistolettes and fried chicken and whatever. You could just dip it in grease and fry if they had it. And also, like at a festival, if you go to eat something at a festival, the—the vendor will usually have boudin and boudin balls. I don't know, just sort of a fun variant to boudin I guess. We were talking earlier about the

Christmas song, the Cajun Christmas song. There was a Cajun Christmas album that came out, it must have been the mid-'80s, and I'm not sure that it was popular anywhere other than the greater Lafayette area, but they would play it on the radio and there was a song called *Boudin Balls* to the tune of *Jingle Bells*. And so every time I see the word *boudin ball*, the phrase *boudin balls*, or I eat a boudin ball, I sing the *Boudin Balls* song.

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SR: How does that go?

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MH: [*Laughs*] I was trying to get away with not doing it. Okay, it's the tune of *Jingle Bells* in case you can't tell from my singing. It goes, *boudin balls, boudin balls on my Christmas tree; you can eat a dozen; I can eat two dozen, meeee—*. There you go. I don't remember the rest of it.

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SR: I wonder if kids still sing that.

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MH: I don't think so, I don't think so. I think it died. We need to bring it back. Yeah, but I remember riding to school you know on the school bus, and this music would be playing on the radio, and we're all singing it you know. [*Laughs*]

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SR: Can you describe for the record what a boudin ball is?

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MH: Okay. My understanding—I've never actually seen one made, and I've only eaten the final product, but it sure looks like it's boudin. It's a mixture of rice and meat and liver and spices rolled up into a ball coated in flour, maybe egg, maybe a little bit of egg, coated in flour, and fried. *[Laughs]*

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SR: You were talking about also how, I mean—and maybe this goes with our conversation about the gas station culture—but you've noticed that places like Super Wal-Mart and fast food places don't necessarily seem to detract from the sort of cultural interest in boudin and foods like that.

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MH: No. It seems like in the minds of the people—I mean you'd have to ask other people to see if they had the same experience, but it seems like in the minds of the people in this area, there are places you go to buy cheap groceries like Super Wal-Mart, you know, just your everyday things, and there are places you go to buy the sort of special foods. And you know, one tradition that we have here is that you get really great meats, for example, at a Cajun meat market. You would never—I mean unless you just couldn't afford anything else, but I don't know people who go to Super Wal-Mart and buy steaks, for example. I mean I wouldn't—the idea of that sounds kind of gross to me. Maybe you would buy ground meat there, ground beef there to make hamburgers or

something, but in general you know the—. Especially you wouldn't serve a guest that. Maybe you would have it for your own family, but you wouldn't serve a guest that. You would go to Hebert's in Maurice, or you would go to one of the places—Earl's on Verot School Road or, I can't think of it but there's a place in Broussard—Chop's, a place called Chop's in Broussard, and in every town, every community, has these places. And the meats are always really well seasoned, the cuts are good, they look great you know. We saw some today. The cuts are good and they're always—they have all this interesting sort of local variance, so they'll have pork chops but they'll be stuffed with crab or shrimp meat or something like that. And they'll have seafood sausages and just sort of different stuff like that in addition to just t-bones and that sort of thing. So that thing is—I think that really matters to people. I can't imagine that that would go away no matter how cheap the groceries got at a big, you know, chain like Wal-Mart. That's sort of irreplaceable.

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SR: It's like really old school gourmet-to-go.

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MH: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I mean it really is, and it's—I guess because the idea at least in my mind is that you have to have a special knowledge to be able to make those meats, to season them correctly, to stuff them correctly, to debone them correctly, and I wouldn't trust someone who was working on an hourly wage at a Super Wal-Mart, you know for just a paycheck to know what they were doing. I would want someone who was—learned from his dad or his uncle

or was taken under the wing by the neighbor, you know, who learned how to do that. It's sort of like—like an artisan maybe, more than just someone who is wrapping ground beef in plastic.

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SR: And where does your family go if you want to get, say, a stuffed chicken?

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MH: We would—my mom's favorite place and my favorite place is Hebert's in Maurice, but there is a really nice, small family-owned grocery store and meat market that's even closer in the middle of Lafayette called Verons, and we'll go to Verons, you know to get stuffed chops and stuff like that.

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SR: Can you tell about what it was like to go to the Boudin Festival when you were growing up?

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MH: Well it's been a long time since I've been to the Boudin Festival, and I don't even know how long it's been since they've had the Boudin Festival at that park in Broussard. I can't remember the name of the park—Anderson Park or something like that. But it was just—it was a very small affair, you know because as festivals go—. We have really big festivals here. Like the Crawfish Festival in Breaux Bridge has thousands of people at it every year, and there are others. Even back in—back then, this was probably the early '90s, you know around 1990, was the last

time I went. There—the Crawfish Festival was a big festival. They did—the Boudin Festival was a small festival then, but it was an opportunity for us as kids in this area—because it’s near where I grew up—it was an opportunity for us to hang out, walk around, you know what middle-schoolers do: you know, they flirt with each other and they throw food at each other and they buy cotton candy from the vendor and that sort of stuff. So that’s what it was for us. It was like a little community fair. I think in some communities, like church fairs fill that function. But for us it was the Boudin Festival and other small festivals like that. I don’t remember if we ate boudin there. I’m sure we probably did, but you can get boudin at any number of places. It wasn’t like that was a special time of the year to eat boudin. It’s not a seasonal food at all, so—.

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SR: You lived—you’ve lived all over the country since you’ve graduated high school. Did you know when you left here how unique your food culture was?

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MH: I had an idea of how it was, you know that it was unique because the whole Cajun explosion happened whenever I was, you know, growing up. So I would see things whenever my family visited other parts of the country that would say *Cajun spice* or something on it, and we would laugh about it. So I knew that that meant something in foodways to other people. But I didn’t realize until I left here sort of the—the number of things that we do—so big and small—and what we eat, and how we prepare what we eat, and how we talk about what we eat, and that we talk about what we eat whereas some people just don’t. I find that surprising—that may really set this place apart. I remember every time I came home I had a list of things that I wanted to eat,

you know whenever we came home. It's like—any one of us—my older brothers lived away for a long time too, so it was like, *Okay, when you get home when are we going to go get a po-boy from Old Tyme, and when are we going to go get seafood at Riverside, and when—you know.*

There was just things that you did when you came home.

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SR: Was boudin one of them?

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MH: That's funny. No, boudin is like a special—I don't know. It was never like it—because you don't eat it like a meal. Like I would never eat boudin as a meal. These were always meals that we planned, but boudin was one of those things that was like a surprise. You know you'd forget about it and then you'd be driving by Comeaux's and you'd be like, *Oh my God, I really want some boudin.* So then you would stop in and get it. That sort of thing.

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SR: It seems like it could be a good late-night food too.

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MH: Yeah, yeah [*Laughs*], but the problem is you want it hot. And I don't know when—you know a boudin vendor is probably closed at 5:00 p.m. I can't imagine they're opened any later than that, so and I don't think you want to put boudin in the microwave, so it seems like—like a lunch food, you know. I've never—or an afternoon snack or something like that. I've never—

you know, you may be onto something. There are all these bars in downtown Lafayette. You put boudin, hot water, and have a cart, and I think you'd have a lot of inebriated folks eating your boudin very happily.

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SR: What about for breakfast? I've seen people eat it for breakfast. Have you ever done that?

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MH: I never have, but I've seen it on menus and in cafés. I mean in Breaux Bridge they have boudin, variants of boudin on their menus and stuff like that. But no, unfortunately, I've never had boudin for breakfast. I would eat it for breakfast I think, but I've never had it. *[Laughs]*

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SR: What about, have you ever introduced, you know, friends from out-of-state or anything to boudin? And if so, what was that like?

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MH: Yeah. In fact I can think of two instances off the top of my head. I think that most of my friends who have come down here, you know they—one of the things they know before they ever get here is that they want to eat the food, and so when I think of things to eat that will be different for them boudin always comes up. And I had a friend down here from Australia and we didn't get any boudin. We got a boudin ball actually at the boucherie in St. Martinsville. This was over the weekend before Mardi Gras, and I think she was sort of surprised at how greasy it

was because it's just a fried ball of boudin. She—one was enough for her. But then I had a friend recently from DC down here, and she had heard about boudin. I don't know where she had heard about it. So we were out driving around and I saw a store on the north side of town, on Louisiana Avenue, that said you know, *best boudin and cracklin'*—of course those two things together—and we stopped and got some, you know, and she really liked it. I think people are really surprised at sort of how—I said this before, but how complex the flavor is: that it kind of mellows. One flavor kind of mellows into another. I think so much American food, sort of standard American food, is so obvious—there's no subtlety to it—that when you eat something like boudin or gumbo, the foods that we like so much down here, you're always surprised by sort of how sophisticated the taste is. Especially when you think it's just a folk food, right.

00:24:45

SR: Can you talk a little bit about what it was like to grow up in a household of not-native Louisianians, and what kind of food you generally ate, and maybe the trajectory of your mom's cooking?

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MH: Sure. Well you should know that South Louisiana has a long history of absorbing people into its culture, and they sort of modify their culture. So you have Cajuns around here name Schexnayder and Smith and Jones, so they're the—the descendants of men who came into this community and married Cajun women. And then, you know the English or the German or the whatever was long gone, and they've become absorbed with the Cajun culture. So I think even though by the time we moved here in the late '70s you had a much more, I don't know—

American pop culture had sort of moved into this area in a bigger way than it ever has before. I think it's still sort of absorbing people. So my family—in a way, you know because my parents raised children—. Even though they had been born and raised and lived into their 20s in East Texas, they raised children here and because our—you know we were at school with other kids mostly from here, that we were at church with other kids mostly from here, and you know all of our after school activities, and my mom got involved in community organizations and tennis teams and stuff. So very quickly our foods, I mean our lives took on a Louisiana tint. The kinds of foods that my grandmother, my mom's mom, who was a great cook, would make, the stuff that mom would have known how to make early in her marriage to my dad, would be stuff like chicken and dumplings, chicken fried steak with gravy—white gravy. I had a teacher once in school; I told him I was going to Northeast Texas for the holiday and he said, *Oh, white gravy*. That was his response. He was from Ville Platte, but the thought was disgusting to him, so—. White gravy is one of those things, fried catfish, that sort of stuff. But then you know, early on my mom would start—she learned how to make gumbo, seafood gumbo or chicken and sausage gumbo, or étouffée or shrimp fettuccine, and all the kinds of stuff that her friends, these women that she was spending her time with, were making. They of course, naturally, would share recipes and stuff and so nobody was eating chicken fried steak. Everybody was eating étouffée. So—and she's a good cook. We had étouffée Saturday night. So it was very good, yeah.

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SR: Shrimp étouffée or—?

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MH: No, crawfish étouffée. For me it has to be crawfish étouffée, yeah.

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SR: What about gumbo? What if she—if your mom makes gumbo now, or when you were growing up, what kind did she make?

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MH: Well she makes the dark kind. My mom has—she uses Savoie’s roux, the roux in the jar, but I think it’s really good, so—. I think making a roux is kind of, takes too long, and the Savoie’s—the darkest roux—. So that’s what I’m used to eating, is a really dark roux. And if she were making it at home she would make chicken and sausage gumbo. She would use andouille and tasso, and a hen if she could—that she would cook. you know, the whole thing, bones in, and that sort of stuff. That had the best flavor.

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SR: Do you make gumbo?

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MH: When I lived up north I would bring Savoie’s roux back with me, and so then I would buy, you know—like in Pittsburgh there’s a great sausage company called Parma Sausage. I would buy the andouille from them. It’s hard to get ingredients up north. That’s the problem, but yeah, I’ve made it a few times and it always turned out well, but of course not as good as my mom’s.

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SR: And—and I'm just asking these questions because we're also doing a Gumbo Trail project. But when you were growing up, was gumbo a special occasion food or was it a Tuesday night food, or what was your relationship?

00:28:33

MH: Gumbo was—I guess we had a very flexible relationship with gumbo. When the weather got cold we would eat gumbo—of course, right. But you didn't—the weather didn't have to be cold for us to eat gumbo. It was just that was a good excuse for us to eat it at home. But gumbo was always one of those things that if we were going to a restaurant, particular restaurants that were known for their gumbo—Don's downtown and Lafayette Riverside Restaurant, which is between Lafayette and Broussard—you'd always get a cup of gumbo. I mean because, you know it was like a good excuse to have some, and you know these places have great gumbo, so—. Unlike boudin, it was something that we did make at home regularly, but we also ate out, or—. And if you went to a friend's house, because there was, I don't know, a family reunion or a company get-together or that sort of thing, I mean gumbo was a good meal that can be used for big groups of people and made for big groups of people. So I've had, you know, lots of my friends' mothers' gumbos and stuff like that too. So I've had gumbo lots of places. **[Laughs]**

00:29:26

SR: I'm curious, maybe you can explain a little bit what your area of interest is: the travel stuff, and—because I'd like to know whether—how far back do you see references to people traveling in this region eating either boudin or gumbo?

00:29:46

MH: Okay. Well my research interest that—I'm most interested in travel and tourism issues. I'm interested in sort of history and travel and tourism and how those—how people have sort of conceived of one another and described one another once, you know, you start writing about another culture the way a travel writer does. There's a lot of power in that. And especially if you have the ability to take what you've written and have it published and introduced to a wider public than—what you say about a group or a person or a region becomes a part of world culture, or the popular culture of the place where it's published. So that interests me a lot. Travelers in this region, what I find interesting, travelers in this region—or most of my research has been into 19th Century travelers, so New Orleans was a very popular locale. A lot of folks either, you know, embarked or disembarked at New Orleans, so it was the first place they went on their travels in the US or it was the last place they came to in their travels to the US, because they could get boats there to Europe. And so—so New Orleans really stood for Louisiana for these travelers in the 19th Century. Southwest Louisiana was really inaccessible. I mean, you know, you could have gotten up the river to Baton Rouge, but to cross the Atchafalaya would have been really, really difficult. If you had gone through the Gulf to the Bayou Teche and up, then you could have visited towns like New Iberia and St. Martinsville, and you would have seen Cajun culture, but really it was just way off the beaten path for a lot of travelers, unfortunately. I think if you start looking in the late 19th Century, you start finding people talking about who those folks were out in the swamps and the prairies of Southwest Louisiana and what kinds of foods they were eating, but it was really late. Especially when you compare how much writing is done about New Orleans, you know at the beginning of the 19th Century, end of the 18th Century.

00:31:31

SR: So you probably do see references to gumbo far back?

00:31:34

MH: Yeah, but you know always in reference to okra. So you know that's—we're told that comes from the word—gumbo comes from a West African language, and it's their word for okra. And so I've often heard and, like, seen writers like Fanny Trollope, who wrote a really famous book about the US called *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. She talks about, you know the exotic fruits and flowers and trees and plants and sort of things that she comes across in her visit to New Orleans, and I think she refers to gumbo, and I think she's referring to okra. She's not referring to the dish that we now call gumbo, so that's a tricky thing to watch out for. Yeah.

00:32:12

SR: That is tricky. Well I've kind of come to the end of my questions unless you have something that you've noticed that I haven't asked you about, either boudin or gumbo or Louisiana food.

00:32:27

MH: I can't think of anything.

00:32:33

SR: Okay. I really appreciate it. You gave me a lot of time today. This has been great. Thank you.

00:32:37

MH: Yeah, thank you.

00:32:39

[End Matt Hackler Interview]