

**VAUGHN SCHMITT**  
**Creole Country – New Orleans, LA**

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Date: August 9, 2006  
Location: Creole Country – New Orleans, LA  
Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Length: 1 hour, 6 minutes  
Project: Gumbo Trail - Louisiana

**[Begin Vaughn Schmitt Interview]**

00:00:00

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans on Wednesday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006 for the Southern Foodways Alliance. And I'm at Creole Country Sausages here on David Street in New Orleans, and I'm with Vaughn Schmitt. Vaughn, would you say your name and your birth date for the record, please?

00:00:19

**Vaughn Schmitt:** Vaughn Schmitt—11/18/56 [November 18, 1956].

00:00:23

**AE:** All right. You and—

00:00:24

**VS:** Deanie [Bowen].

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**AE:** —are the co-owners of this establishment, is that right?

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**VS:** Yes.

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**AE:** But your parents started it?

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**VS:** My mother and father started it in 1979. And it was an old house that we shelled out and made into a little sausage factory. And then they went to Oklahoma State University for a two-week crash course in sausage making. And from that on, they played around with different recipes, and we basically started off making smoked sausage, andouille [sausage], hogshead cheese, boudin—the basic sausages that people would want in New Orleans. And from then on out we introduced ourselves to the chefs in New Orleans, and they always came up with their ideas of what they would want, and we would work together and make different products. So we have a hot sausage called chaurice and the chaurice—and now we have a crawfish [sausage], green onion [sausage]; we have an alligator sausage; we have a craw-gator, which is an alligator sausage made with crawfish tails, because one guy wanted something different. And then we have a cheese and jalapeno smoked sausage—very unique. And we also work with chicken and make a chicken and apple sausage some certain chef out there wanted. And we use turkey products also, so we make a turkey andouille and a turkey Italian. And then, if people out there are interested—if they have heart problems and they can't have sodium or no preservatives or this, that, and the other, I can also custom-make to their—their wants or needs so the can enjoy the products with no—no salts, no this, or whatever they want in it.

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**AE:** Wow. Let me go back to your parents for a minute, if I—if I may.

00:01:58

**VS:** All right.

00:02:00

**AE:** What were their names?

00:02:00

**VS:** Fabiola Schmitt and Fred—well, say Ricker Schmitt. So we called them Fab Schmitt and Ricker Schmitt.

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**AE:** So Frederick was his [Ricker's] first name?

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**VS:** Frederick Lawler Schmitt, yeah.

00:02:11

**AE:** Okay. And were they native New Orleanians or did they—?

00:02:12

**VS:** My mother was from Church Point [Louisiana, which is in Cajun Country].

00:02:16

**AE:** Okay. And your father?

00:02:16

**VS:** My father was from New Orleans.

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**AE:** Okay. So what did—what made them want to go in the sausage business?

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**VS:** Well he was in politics, and he always wanted to open a restaurant, and my mother wouldn't allow him to go—because that's like too late working all day—all the time working. So she said, "Let's—let's go to Church Point and buy sausage." And the guy in Church Point closed down, and so they went over there and bought his little equipment. He [my father] came back, and they came over here and played with recipes; and they decided to open up a sausage factory because they had—excuse me—they don't think they had any people over here [in New Orleans] that made quality sausage. It's basically the stuff you get off the shelves in the grocery stores; they invented Creole Country.

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**AE:** And where is Church Point?

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**VS:** It's a little bit north off of Lafayette.

00:02:58

**AE:** Okay.

00:02:58

**VS:** It's like what, a half-hour north. It's a very small town. You could blink, and you wouldn't see it, you know, if you pass by.

00:03:04

**AE:** Okay. So when they got the equipment and everything from the old place, did they get recipes, too, or they just started from scratch?

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**VS:** Oh, basic recipes but I think what they did is they went through cookbooks and looked for sausage recipes and stuff you can get at the—I mean at the bookstores and stuff and then they worked them out into they—they ended up making a lot of good products from basic recipes. The basic recipe is salt, pepper, a little garlic pepper, crushed red, and then you get that and you throw a little Italian—to make Italian [sausage] you would throw fennel in there. And then if you want throw some sage for breakfast sausage or just have that, and they'd set up and make smoked sausage. And then if you want hot, you would add cayenne pepper, you know, but it's more to that—to it than that. You just add different flavors to get different seasonings.

00:03:49

**AE:** Uh-hmm. And so they opened this place, Creole Country, in 1979?

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**VS:** Correct.

00:03:55

**AE:** And how involved were you at that time?

00:03:56

**VS:** I was very young; I wasn't that much. I was working for a pest control company, and I would just come in—in the afternoons and clean up for extra money. My older brothers were working with my father, and they were doing it; so I was really not into it until maybe, five to ten years later.

00:04:12

**AE:** What are your brothers' names?

00:04:12

**VS:** Colin, Keith, Ricky, and Scott.

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**AE:** Oh wow, okay. [*Laughs*] And none of them are involved anymore?

00:04:21

**VS:** Not at all.

00:04:22

**AE:** Wow. What kind of—when and how did that kind of change take place when you started?

00:04:28

**VS:** Well the hurricane [Katrina in 2005] took two of them away because they ended up having—we were closed for almost a year, and they didn't feel like waiting because they had families, and there's no business here, so they went and found—. My one [brother], Scott was working here, and he's an optometrist, so he went back in the eyeglass business. And Colin went to work for the Federal Government at the airport, which they needed people to do, and he always wanted to work for the Feds because it's kind of like, you know, you get great benefits and stuff, and it's closer to his house also.

00:04:59

**AE:** Okay, so the were pretty involved up until [Hurricane] Katrina?

00:05:02

**VS:** Then—yes.

00:05:02



**AE:** Okay. So now it's just you and Deanie and your employees?

00:05:05

**VS:** Right.

00:05:05

**AE:** How many employees do you have?

00:05:08

**VS:** We have two, four, six altogether. I mean, with me and Deanie. And that's about all we got for right now.

00:05:16

**AE:** Is that enough; can you keep up?

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**VS:** Not really but with the money that's in it right now, it's got be enough.

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**AE:** Yeah.

00:05:21

**VS:** Until we get through the year and the conventions start coming back into town, and we start making New Orleans the old New Orleans we used to have, you know.

00:05:28

**AE:** And we were—and we were talking yesterday, and you were telling me that your mother just passed in April, is that right?

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**VS:** Yes.

00:05:34

**AE:** And your father passed not long before that?

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**VS:** He was in the eighties—low eighties. [*Frederick Schmitt passed in 1995*] I'm not sure, but we miss him a lot. But they're out here with us, helping us run the company.

00:05:43

**AE:** Uh-hmm. And I read—I was telling Deanie yesterday, when I read that article that was in the *Gambit Weekly*, which was a great article by the way, that just came out this week that the recipes that your mom had, she wrote down and that those survived the hurricane?

00:05:56

**VS:** Oh, we still have them and they're in my—I know them all now, you know so—but we still have copies of them, and that's still the heartbeat of the company because that's the basic sausage recipes.

00:06:07

**AE:** Well how would you say your sausages are different from other people's sausages?

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**VS:** Well we use good quality meat, and we don't use any cereals, no soy, no byproducts. Every piece of meat that comes in here—every day I get fresh meat in, and it's never been frozen. And every piece of meat that I use is mostly used up by the end of the week, and it's all properly cooked and packed and stored properly and mostly sold. By the next week it's probably all eaten. So it's never going to be more than a few days old, if you buy it. And other people's is always in a big plant that you prepackage, and it's made in thousands of pounds and you don't know how old the stuff—not going to say any names but the products that are on the shelves in the grocery stores, and then they'll sit for a month in the grocery store—what kinds of preservatives are sitting in there. So that's why I think that mine won't have maybe but a two-week shelf life, so if you don't eat it in a week, I'd say freeze it. But every grocery store we sell to is usually buying about twice a week, and by the end of the week we're already stocking them up with fresh stuff. So I don't over-stock.

00:07:16

**AE:** So what's the ratio of selling to the grocery stores and to restaurants; is it about equal or do you sell to more restaurants?

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**VS:** We've only got like six grocery stores. We have the Martin Wine Cellar, the Langenstein's, Dorignac's and the market on Esplanade and Zuppardo's. So I don't use the Save-a-Centers, the big grocery stores; people that shop there are looking for cheap. I only go high-end grocery stores, which people don't mind, and they like the flavor, and they're familiar with the product. So I'd say the restaurant and grocery stores—I'd say restaurants, those are my main business.

00:07:51

**AE:** Uh-hmm. And I know you sell to Liuzza's by the Track because Billy Grueber is the one who sent me over here, but what are some other restaurants that you sell to?

00:07:58

**VS:** Well sell to all the Brennan Restaurants, Ralph's on the Park, Mr. B's, Bourbon House, Red Fish Grill, Napoleon House and, of course, Liuzza's by the Track. And let's see here—Bozo's Restaurant in Metairie. Right now that's all I can think of. Most of the major hotels downtown, we sell to all them.

00:08:21

**AE:** Now tell me about that. Because Deanie took me into the cooler yesterday, and there's a bigger sausage that y'all make specifically for the Sheraton [Hotel]?

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**VS:** Oh, yeah. It's a log that we use an artificial casing [for], and we stuff the product in there; and what we do is a duck and an alligator and an andouille [sausage]. And then after I cook it—it—they'll peel the fake casing off of it and—which would be more like a giant salami with no skin on it, and they can slice it to the size they want, and it will be all pure meat, and they make usually, I guess, they put it on buffet like and that. Or make like—andouille—would be a Cajun Eggs Benedict or something—whatever idea the chef would come up to use it with.

00:08:59

**AE:** And so they specifically requested that size and—?

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**VS:** Yes, they like that because it fits good on like a bun or something like that.

00:09:06

**AE:** Hmm. Have you done that for anyone else—that size?

00:09:08

**VS:** Yeah. Let's see, other people might call me. Like Marriott [Hotel] wants the log sliced because they will put that in the buffet. So I guess it looks like it takes the place of one of those little raunchy sausages that you can get at Shoney's [restaurants] and things like that; I'm not sure. The breakfast patty. So they can get the Cajun Andouille instead.

00:09:26

**AE:** Okay. Can you talk a little bit about the different the sausages? Like, in particular, start off for the record the difference between hot sausage and chaurice?

00:09:38

**VS:** Well the hot sausage is mainly a salt, pepper, garlic powder, and cayenne pepper, white pepper, and paprika. And if it's seasoned properly, it's going to taste good with the proper meat, and it's real good. The chaurice—the French version of chorizo, which is the Spanish version of the chaurice. I hope I'm talking this all right. But anyway, chaurice is made with chili powder, four different kind of peppers and thyme, all-spice, and the chili powder gives it a little Spanish-French flavor. I don't know how chaurice does it, but that's where we got this recipe out of the cookbook. So it's—it's—chaurice was supposed to be a real hot sausage but I mild-ed it down because the flavor was so good that so even the older people can come in and enjoy it. So if someone special-orders, they want hot chaurice, I'll make a hot batch, you know. But the regular hot sausage has no chili powder in it, so it's just mainly a hot sausage.

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**AE:** Is the density of the packing of the sausage different at all or—?

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**VS:** No, it's the same meat, same grind—just different seasoning.

00:10:42

**AE:** And then andouille, can you talk about that?

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**VS:** Andouille is a smoked sausage.

**[Interruption]**

00:10:48

**Deanie Bowen:** Good morning.

00:10:48

**AE:** Good morning. How are you?

00:10:49

**VS:** [Andouille,] that's a coarse-grind smoked sausage, which means it's in bigger chunks, and it's real good. And it doesn't have to be—someone tried to make something different, and it's leaner than a smoked sausage, and it's good for gumbos and stuff. You can also put a little more fat to it, which helps out when you make the gumbo, and they add the sausage to it. It would dry out if, it's too lean. So I always like to add a little more fat to the andouille.

00:11:11

**AE:** Uh-hmm. But like Billy [Grueber, chef/owner of Liuzza's by the Track] says, he likes to use your smoked sausage for his gumbo.

00:11:16

**VS:** Yeah. Because it has a little more fat consistency, and it doesn't dry out as much. Actually, I use my smoked sausage for my gumbo also. It depends on the chef, what they like, you know; some people like the lean, lean stuff because it wouldn't put any grease in his gumbo and everything. But I always say, when you use a lean andouille, after you do the cooking of the gumbo, you add it in the last half-hour or so; the sausage flavor gets into it but it doesn't dry it out. And the smoked sausage you can add a little sooner because then it will give it a little more flavor but, of course, it's best to wait to the next day to eat your gumbo, and that way you can skim the fat off the top of the gumbo.

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**AE:** Now tell me about your gumbo real quick.

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**VS:** Well my mother taught it to me. Of course, she was—lived in Church Point [which is in Cajun Country], so we'd make the roux. And Billy [Grueber] made his roux on top of the stove; we make our roux in the oven at a temperature of 400, I think, or 350 [degrees]. And we get half oil and half flour and put it in the oven for, I think, ten or fifteen minutes—and then have a timer, and we stir it all the way until it gets dark enough to what we like. Start off with a gallon of water, onion, bell pepper, and we boil that for a while and put the chicken in there, of course.



And I use boneless thigh meat because that way we don't have to pick it so much. And then what we do on that, after we get it to like it's chicken soup [consistency]—I'll add chicken bouillon to get it—make it like chicken soup—and once you got all that done, you take out the meat and that way you can shred it to the way you like it. And you add your roux and basically, you have gumbo. You can salt and pepper it to your taste and then you've got—everything else is being added. I'll add okra at the end and a little tomato, and then that's basically it. And then you can let it simmer for a little while with the sausage and the chicken that's tore up, and then you'll have gumbo. I mean you can add—like Billy adds shrimp and oysters to his, which makes his a little different, and it's very good.

00:13:04

**AE:** So do you make a thicker gumbo or a thinner gumbo?

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**VS:** I think mine is a little thicker than his, but I don't like it thick-thick because you get too much flour taste. So I think Liuzza's by the Track has one of the best gumbos in the city.

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**AE:** What do you think makes a good gumbo?

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**DB:** Sausage.

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**VS:** Good answer. [*Laughs*] Sausage.

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**AE:** Okay. [*Laughs*]

00:13:26

**VS:** Creole Country sausage.

00:13:29

**AE:** Can we talk about the roux again, too, because we were talking about that a little bit yesterday. And Deanie, if you want to chime in—.

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**VS:** Deanie should tell you more about the roux because she knows.

00:13:37

**DB:** It's one-to-one oil and flour. Put it in the pot, and put it in the oven between 375 and 400 [degrees]. Every fifteen minutes take it out and stir it and put it back in—fifteen minutes, four times. The most beautiful roux—can't burn it and you get what, four or five pints?

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**VS:** Four pints, yeah.

00:13:52

**AE:** And then what color do you end up with?

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**DB:** Oh, a deep, deep burg—like a red-brown, deep, deep—beautiful.

00:14:00

**VS:** It was like your [chocolate brown] shirt; I showed you [the roux] yesterday [that was in the refrigerator], you know.

00:14:03

**AE:** Would you—oh, that's right. Would you say that it tastes different, being made in the oven than on the top of the stove?

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**DB:** Nah.

00:14:08

**AE:** It's easier.

00:14:09

**DB:** It's more consistent. And, in fact, we can make it like that and keep it in the refrigerator, so we don't have to do it every time. You know, a lot of times when you do it on the stove, it's just for that one time.

00:14:20

**AE:** All right. *[To Vaughn]* So where do y'all get your meat that you use to make the sausage?

00:14:24

**VS:** I get most of the meat—a lot of it comes from Natko Supply Company and Scariano Meat Company, and both companies have got affected by the storm also, and they've been transplanted, so we all have been doing business before the storm. Well since the beginning in 1979, these are the people I've been dealing with. And there's no reason to change. You know, I might buy some from somebody else once in a while, if they don't have it. But you know, it's like a family. If you've been doing business with people for thirty years, you've known them and it's—it's personable, you know. We're not just like a number. I call up the owner and we talk; we're friends—both companies—and stuff and about—we're supposed to be re-inventing a new sausage as we speak. We've got to make a breakfast sausage for the Wyndham Hotel—Wyndham. Or the Windsor Court, that's it. And it's supposed to be a chicken and mango [sausage]. So we went out to the International House of Foods last—yesterday afternoon and went and bought all sorts of mango. We've got a pulp mango in the can, we've got mango slices in the can, and we have dried mango. So we're not sure which one we're going to use because we've got to go find the right taste with the sausage.

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**AE:** How long do you think that will take when you're making these [custom] sausages?

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**VS:** Well once my chicken gets here, I can probably do it in a day because what I'll do is I'll have ten pounds—three different batches of ten pounds of chicken—and then three different batches of mango chopped up, and the seasoning is basically going to be the same for each batch. It's which mango will give us the proper flavor for the chef. So the slices [of dried mango] I tried yesterday. I didn't like it too much. It wasn't sweet enough, you know. It tasted like just blah. And then the pulp we haven't opened up yet, and that's what we're going to do today just to see how it tastes. And then the dried mango I liked a lot. It was very good. It had good flavor, so I want to see how—if I grind the dried mango up and mix it with the chickens and see how it works. But with it be—being dry, I'm not sure how it's going to spread out, you know, or should. Maybe we cut it by hand, which would take too long. So it's all a learning process, making a new product, and it has to taste good when we finish. And then after I like it, then it has to have the chef like it at the hotel.

00:16:40

**AE:** How often do you get custom sausage orders like that?

00:16:43

**VS:** It comes when it comes, you know. I can't say it's all the time, but every chef has an idea, and whenever they think of what they want, I try to get with them or get with somebody and

work it out, so that they'll do business with us—or in this case they'll do business with Natko because that's who they're going through. So I'm—

00:17:01

**AE:** But if someone orders a custom sausage like this chicken and mango sausage, then do they have exclusive rights, basically, to that sausage, or could you sell it?

00:17:10

**VS:** Well, not really. I—if someone else wants something different, I'll push it, you know. I'm in business to make money. But for right now, it will be their sausage. But if it comes out to be a sausage that someone else needs, I'll put it on my product list, and people will be able to read it. And if they want to try, they get to have it. Yeah, so they just made the beginning happen.

00:17:33

**AE:** And you were telling me yesterday, too, about the hot wing sausage?

00:17:39

**VS:** Yes. A friend of mine at the Health Club came over here, and he has this idea of buffalo sausage—buffalo wing sausage. So actually, we got the chicken, he brought the blue cheese, he brought the celery, he chopped it up. He had fresh garlic, chopped that up real nice and fine, little celery salt; we mixed it all in and a little Crystal Hot Sauce, which we're not using Crystal anymore I want you to know because Crystal moved out of New Orleans. We're going to go with

Louisiana Hot Sauce. I'm just joking. But it came out delicious. And as a matter of fact, if you didn't get to try any—

00:18:08

**AE:** Um-um.

00:18:09

**VS:** —I got some we can cook up in a little while.

00:18:11

**AE:** Okay, okay.

00:18:12

**VS:** And that way you can have your opinion of it.

00:18:13

**AE:** [*Laughs*]

00:18:14

**VS:** It's very good. It's different, but it has a similar flavor. I serve it with a little sauce on the side, you know, because it probably sucks up all the flavor, the sauce, so it doesn't have that little kick that I would like it to have.

00:18:28

**AE:** Is that something others did for fun, to try it?

00:18:30

**VS:** That was fun, yeah. It came up good. He brings it to the Health Club. And every so often we'll bring hogshead cheese and sausage at the Health Club, and we sit around the little bar and have beers. That's the kind of Health Club we go to and—. [*Laughs*] And we'll sit around there and Mark, the guy who helps him make the stuff, will go back in back and make a pound with jalapenos and season it up and do a pound with sautéed onions and stuff. It's all in having fun with your business. So these guys just come over, and they'll all come buy a little stuff for me once in a while, and I'll bring a bunch of stuff over there, and that's what we do. You can't not have fun and entertain yourself and have fun with other people. It's not—I'm not going to be a stuck-up businessman, you know.

00:19:12

**AE:** I hear you, yeah.

00:19:14

**VS:** I enjoy people coming to visit us and then cruise around and watch what we do. The kids—I give tours to children, you know, anybody who wants to come bring their class through. And the culinary schools, I give those people tours. And what they learn—and when they leave here they have a blast because I bring them through, I show them—they ask me questions about everything, and I show them how to make tasso, how we make sausage and all the different skins



we use and stuff. And on the way out I let them sample everything, so they get fed well, get Cokes and all that. I'm sure they'd rather [get] beer, but that's not going to happen. And on their way out, I mean, I have still today people from years and years ago, they come up and thank me about the tours they've been through. So it's a compliment, and we enjoy doing it.

00:19:56

**AE:** Yeah, it's cool that you've been playing up to that.

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**VS:** It's fun, though.

00:20:01

**AE:** So I want to ask you too about your boudin that you make. We're also doing a boudin project. Do you sell—make and sell a lot of boudin here?

00:20:13

**VS:** Yeah. I—I don't sell as much as I would like to. Before the storm, I sold it pretty much, you know. Right now it goes—comes and goes. So instead of making 100-pound batches, I make half-batches and then—you need to know the recipes of making boudin or some basic recipes?

00:20:30

**AE:** Sure, yeah, I'd love to hear.

00:20:31

**VS:** Boudin is mainly a dirty rice. And you cook your pork or your beef, which I use pork. You get your vegetables, which you can choose bell pepper, onion, or whichever you like—celery in there, too—and you would boil that a little bit just to soften it up. And then you’d get some type of beef bullion and mix that in there with it. And then you’d cook your amount of rice with the amount of meat you would have. And then you would mix all of that together, season it up with the basic salt/pepper recipe I told you I have. And then some people would add chicken livers or calf liver to it and—we don’t use liver—and then that’s a boudin. And then you would stuff it into a casing, and you’d link it to the sized links. And then we’ll run ours through the smoker, so it does cook the skin to the boudin, which it makes it bond together; so when you try to cook with it or heat it up, it doesn’t burst out the ends and stuff, you know. So basically, a boudin is like a little dirty rice in a casing.

00:21:25

**AE:** But you say yours is spicy—on the spicy side or—?

00:21:28

**VS:** No. I make it medium. But if someone calls and orders, “I want hot boudin,” I just make a batch of whichever they want it.

00:21:34

**AE:** And restaurants are buying your boudin?

00:21:35

**VS:** Some of them are. As a matter of fact, the lady was just here—Martin Winsdale ordered some boudin for the grocery store, so I'm going to make it fresh instead of giving her the stuff I've had sitting here for five days already. I'll stick that in the freezer, which is still good. When you want something to go in the grocery store, you want the product to be like brand new so that it has a shelf life—it's good before it's sold. So I don't have a lot of preservatives, and it's going to give you a month to sell it, so I—plus, that's the way I do. I care about my customers and want to make sure they get the right product. It might take a few more days for them to get it, but it will be a better product, and they won't have to worry about spoilage, you know. Because that way everybody loses money, if you've got something you throw away, so I prevent that.

00:22:18

**AE:** Yeah. Well being—your—with your mother being from Cajun Country, and the boudin tradition is so prominent there, and a lot of new markets selling it and roadside stands and whatnot—I haven't see a lot of boudin in New Orleans. Do you, I mean—

00:22:36

**VS:** I don't see it here, either. It's more of a gumbo city, I would think—Jambalaya and red beans. Boudin is not used. It's more like the small stores in the little northern cities that make it—the mom and pop operations. I mean some big companies do make it but I'll—I'll go buy different boudins from the grocery stores just to check out the competition—their flavors and stuff—and I enjoy eating other products. I mean there's other sausage factories that have

different stuff, and we all season our stuff differently, and it's fun to taste their way and compare my stuff to them. But I'm always the best. **[Laughs]**

00:23:12

**AE:** **[Laughs]** Growing up, did you go to your mom's hometown and visit and—?

00:23:16

**VS:** I was there a few times, and we always enjoyed it. She lived on a farm. She had tons of chickens; she had sheep. They had places—of course, we would go and make havoc of the house and get in trouble every time because we were boys in the city. You found sheep and chickens to go chase the whole time, so we caused a lot of trouble. They probably banned us from Church Point. **[Laughs]**

00:23:37

**AE:** I don't know about all that. **[Laughs]** So what is it that you like about being in the sausage business, would you say?

00:23:43

**VS:** Let me think about that. **[Short pause]** No, it's fun. It's the people you interact with, being in sales, and meet—everybody you meet. It's just a fun business. It's—any business, as long as you're taking it the right way and get out there and enjoy it in the right frame of mind, it's—you can't beat it. If you go to work and you're miserable every day, you just as soon get out of it. Everywhere I go we're labeled “the sausage people.” Deanie rides around with a truck with

*Creole Country* on the side. They pull her over, “I need something.” So she’s over here more when she’s off than she’s—when she’s working. So but it’s a fun business. So I can—I enjoy it.

00:24:21

**AE:** Is there anything you don’t like about it?

00:24:25

**VS:** No, I really enjoy it.

00:24:29

**DB:** Can I get that in writing. [*Laughs*]

00:24:32

**VS:** What did you want me to say? “No, I hate it. Ugh?” Wake up in the morning, I’d—I’m working for myself; you can’t beat that. But I can’t make my own hours. They give—it makes my hours. We was over here six days a week, and I’ve gotten used to it. And then I’ve gotten—I’ve grown up even more since my mother has passed; the brothers are gone, so I’ve taken on a lot more responsibilities. But putting up with Deanie is a tough thing, too. Put that in writing.

[*Laughs*]

00:25:03

**AE:** Can we talk a little bit about how the storm has changed your business and how it took a while to get back?

00:25:07

**VS:** Yeah, it took—it was messed up pretty badly, and we had to gut the whole place, so we rebuilt it from—almost from the ground to the top. Everything is brand new. It took us seven months and a lot of hard work, and I actually helped do the hard work because not working would drive you nuts. And so we got everything fixed up, as far as the new equipment, and once we got—and I said, “Deanie we’re not worried about the front. The back is ready.” And we went right to work. I ordered the meat, got the inspection done, because you can’t do anything—we’re inspected every day. So once I got the inspection approved and the place was pretty, we started making sausage.

00:25:47

**AE:** Did you upgrade at all from what you had before?

00:25:49

**VS:** I didn’t change much at all. I wanted to leave it so—my mom and dad—

00:25:52

**DB:** Maybe the equipment, yeah.

00:25:53

**AE:** You bought more?

00:25:54

**DB:** Yeah, we bought like a deeper cook pot that had, you know, a new funnel on the bottom. And we did upgrade stuffer we use in the back. It was a step and you were supposed to stand like this all day [*stands with on leg raised*] and stuff.

00:26:07

**VS:** It's basically the same. It was a bad looking—.

00:26:11

**DB:** I agree with you.

00:26:11

**VS:** The only thing I changed was a cook-room door because it used—the cook-room was into this one [what is now the packing room, which is just off of the office], so when I'm boiling and heating stuff to make hogshead cheese, the heat would come right back. So then I moved it to the hall, which I'll show you. And it does—this room [the packing room] stays real nice and cold, which it's supposed to be.

00:26:27

**AE:** And this is the packing room, basically?

00:26:29

**VS:** Right. So you have to have your refrigeration rooms at least forty, forty-six degrees while you're packing it at all times. And the processing room also. But when you cook everything, it doesn't have to be cold because everything is hot, and so as long as all the heat goes in one room, that's fine.

00:26:44

**AE:** So tell me a little bit about the timing of like when your customers were getting back into their business and restaurants were opening and when you were back in business? Was that—?

00:26:53

**VS:** Well I was out of business maybe—what six months Deanie still once the customer base started being here?

00:26:57

**DB:** No, we were out until April 19<sup>th</sup>.

00:27:01

**VS:** Yeah. But restaurants and stuff had to clean out all this mess also, but they had months, maybe—maybe a month or two to do that, and then they were back in business—not all of them, of course. Some of the hotels—we would go downtown and things. I saw the hotels and restaurants were doing—it was hard to stay downtown the smell was so bad, but they were just cleaning out the coolers. I mean they couldn't help it if they lost power and—whoever thought



that we were going to be lost power for that length of time and water was going to come in and—so—? But we were—after they were—like I say, maybe a third of them were back. It took us like four or five more months to finish up what we were doing, but we didn't want to half-ass it and rush to get back in business. So we did the right job, and did it real good. And a lot of it we did ourselves. And after that we got back business, and it didn't come easy, you know. We're still out there partly trying to get it back. [*Phone Rings*]

[*Phone rings*]

00:27:55

**DB:** [*On the phone*] Good morning, Creole's.

00:27:58

**VS:** The Hyatt Regency is still not back, a bunch of restaurants still aren't back; there are a few other hotels that still haven't come back all the way. But what we're doing is just waiting for other customers coming back in. And football season, we're excited to have. And if she [Deanie] plays her cards right, she might get us back in the Super Dome, which would be a good help, you know.

00:28:16

**AE:** If she plays her cards right? Deanie?

00:28:17

**VS:** Well Deanie is doing that sales calling, you know.

00:28:20

**AE:** Oh, oh, I see. Okay.

00:28:21

**VS:** So, you know, if I go in there and call the Super Dome, I'd have to follow up on it. So I'll let Deanie have it this time because she's good at sales, and I figure maybe men purchasing agents would rather deal with a woman—some of them would.

00:28:37

**AE:** So y'all were selling to the Super Dome before the storm [Hurricane Katrina]?

00:28:39

**VS:** Oh, yes. We sold to them the last Super Bowl we had. Deanie, you want to hit on that?

**[Laughs]**

00:28:47

**DB:** This one of my sales—that—that green onion sausage was chosen exclusively to be used in the Super Dome for the Super Bowl. It's 3,000 pounds and now—since nine-eleven [2001 World Trade Center bombing], so no one is busy in the city, you know. Our comrades would call and said, "Oh man, it's so slow." And I couldn't really tell them, "Oh, not us. We're really hustling." But—and it was cut in six-inch pieces. The last morning of the—the one before the game, the purchasing agent called and said they had 2,600 pounds, and I thought they don't need

anymore—they don't need anymore. They called us up; we did a count. "We want the 3,000 pounds." Someone had been bribing or whatever—gotten past all the security the hoghead cheese and whatever else—well this day he called him in an infrared truck. So I was thinking to myself, he [Vaughn] called and he said, "I'm sitting in here and they're infrared-ing [the truck]." I was thinking, I can see them now, [they think the sausage is] sticks of dynamite. But you know, six-inch pieces, 400 pounds of sausage—it must look like sticks of dynamite. but of course it wasn't.

00:29:41

**VS:** They—they—actually, I pulled up in the [Super] Dome lot—or next to the Dome lot—and they had a big machine and it goes—a big arm came out with x-ray, and it would go around your whole truck checking for bombs and whatever. One of the sausage boxes had tilted over, so it didn't look too right. So they had to go through and open up the boxes and stuff. I didn't mind because I knew what I had, and they just had to do it—their procedure—and that doesn't bother me, you know. I'd go in there—look, when I make a delivery, I go from meeting the guy that signs it in to the guy that opens the door, the dishwasher—I tell them all hi. I get to know everybody in our industry. And it's more fun that way. So I mean people—even from butchers, "I saw you on TV." Because we were on John Schnell or whatever we were doing, and it's just fun to interact. I don't ever think I'm up above anybody, you know. I'm just Vaughn Schmitt the sausage man [*hits table*] and whoever you are out there, I'm your friend. You know, from the—it's fun. It really is.

00:30:39

**AE:** How was it making that 3,000 pounds of sausage? Were you up for days straight or was it something that you—?

00:30:43

**VS:** Oh, they gave me a good—about—a nice time. And they would stick it in their freezer. But we had to cut them into six-inch pieces; that took a lot of time, too. But whatever it takes me to fill an order, I'm here to do it.

00:30:56

**AE:** Yeah? And actually, I remember that Billy [Grueber, chef/owner of Liuzza's by the Track] said that he wanted his sausage sliced, and you took it somewhere else to get it sliced or—?

00:31:03

**VS:** No, I used to have a man that would come in and slice it for us. But no, I bring it over here; I—he had gone somewhere else and bought; when I was out of business, he bought someone else's sausage, and they sliced, so he never came back to us because he bought a lot for—they were so low—I mean they didn't have the right amount of people, so he didn't buy from me for a long time. I said, "Billy, I'll have my guy slice it for you. What's the price and I'll match it?" So we just got him back. So—but he called me up the next day and said, "Vaughn, it's so good to have your sausage back in the gumbo." He goes, "Really, it makes—." He says it makes a difference. So we started in the slicing mode, so whenever we need slicing, we've got to have people—we all pitch in and do it because it takes time to do, you know.

00:31:48

**AE:** Please tell me you have a[n automatic] slicer.

**VS:** [*Shakes head “no.”*]

00:31:49

**AE:** You’re kidding me?

00:31:51

**VS:** No, because a slicer is hard—to set it up and then get it set right and then do it, and then you can only have two—by the time you did all that, you can have the pound done already. Plus, I have a nice junior chef over here that slices real well. But like I had—I had another kid come in and help doing it, and I think, by hand, these guys are so professional, they just slice—

00:32:13

**DB:** We actually had two slicers—two nice Hobart slicers prior to the storm.

00:32:19

**VS:** [*To Deanie, who is walking up the stairs*] Hey, we’re on video right here; you keep going way over there. You’ve got to come over here by the speaker.

00:32:27

**DB:** It was always—you could not keep them clean, and it was just always jamming up; we always had problems with it. I think it might have had to do with the employee that was running

it also. Like Vaughn said, the hand-slicing the top is more consistent, yeah. The guy back here has got culinary skills; he gets his arm going, it looks like a motor.

00:32:49

**VS:** *[To interviewer]* Can you turn that off now and let me go get started in the back? And then once I get that going, you can come back and we can talk some more.

*[Recording is paused for about ten minutes, as Vaughn sets up to make a batch of sausage.]*

*[Recording resumes.]*

00:32:55

**AE:** Would you mind saying that one more time?

00:32:57

**VS:** This is the pork skins [cooking here in this vat], which we use natural pork skins to make gelatin to make the hogshead cheese, instead of using like a Knox gelatin and artificial gelatin. So what we do is we cook this down and it gets real tender—tender and then that's how we make gelatin. And that's only one part of the hogshead cheese.

00:33:16

**AE:** What else do you use this contraption for?

00:33:18

**VS:** I cook my hogshead meat in there, I make boudin in there, and I cook the boudin meat. You can hear it's not working too well. It seems like it's sick, and it's brand new, so we're going to have to get somebody to come out here and take a look at it. It's not supposed to cut off like that, you know. It's a nice piece of equipment. I'll just go in the back here and see if he's got everything set up. Let me make the meat and get everything ready.

00:33:59

**AE:** Okay, okay.

**[Short pause]**

00:34:01

**VS:** We use different kinds of fish that's fresh [for seafood sausage], and what I'll do is I'll get catfish. Sometimes they'll bring shark or anything. We—you want to use a cheaper fish, but it has to be fresh. And what we do is we grind the fish up, and then I get some shrimp that could be like 150-pound or a nice sized shrimp. And we don't grind those up. And we'll mix that together. The fish is the binder. And then you put shallots in there or green onions, salt, pepper, little garlic powder, and there you have a seafood sausage, and there's no meat.

00:34:31

**AE:** And that guy that just called, he said that he would bring the stuff by today, and you'll have it done this afternoon?

00:34:35

**VS:** Well he owns—he owns a fish house. A whole big—he’s one of the biggest seafood distributors in New Orleans, and he knows what I can do. We’ve been doing business over the years, but he never gives me a day. He has to—he’s just got to defrost the shrimp. But he always needs his stuff now, you know. And, you know, like if he gives you more than a little time, I can do the seafood first thing in the morning because that gets it out of the way but—. [***Making introductions in the sausage-making room.***] This is my chef, Jimmy.

00:35:04

**AE:** Hi. Amy. Nice to meet you.

00:35:07

**VS:** He’s good. And all right, what we’ve got here is we’ve got boneless picnics. This is what I use to make crawfish green onion sausage. If you want to take a picture of it, it’s ground up on a fine grind; what we’re going to do is we’re going to drop 180 pounds of meat in here for right now and then we got boneless picnic. Jimmy, you can come talk while I—. What we’re going to do is we’re going to add the seasoning to it. And then we got a special mixed seasoning for the crawfish green onion [sausage]. You can get closer, if you want to get up here and take a picture of it—each step. And it’s just adding the seasoning in the meat.

00:36:15

**AE:** You said this is chicken?

00:36:15



**VS:** No, this is the crawfish green onion. It's going to be all pork.

00:36:20

**AE:** Pork, okay.

00:36:21

**VS:** The chicken stuff, I'm going to play with that after we make everything that we need to go out. Then we're going to add the green onions [to the pork mixture here].

00:36:45

**AE:** Smells great.

00:36:45

**VS:** Perfect amount. This guy knows how to cut. Looks good. One pound of crawfish to every ten pounds of pork, so I have 180 pounds of meat, so we have eighteen pounds of crawfish tails. And you go from the green to the brick red; you get your color. All right, so we've got orange.

**[Laughs]**

00:37:31

**AE:** Where do you get your crawfish?

00:37:33

**VS:** Oh, we buy them from New Orleans fish houses and different seafood places; they come in like packs—one-pound packs frozen so—. Yeah, don't quote that because we want them to think we're using American crawfish, you know what I mean. But actually, you can't get—it's so much more expensive you know so they do—they come from this—this came from Spain—.

00:37:54

**VS:** Spanish crawfish.

00:37:54

**AE:** Get out.

00:37:55

**VS:** They got them from—where else they have them from? Turkey, China, yeah.

00:38:00

**AE:** Huh.

00:38:02

**VS:** You would think you would be able to buy local crawfish cheaper than from all out of the country, you know.

00:38:08

**AE:** Huh.

00:38:13

**VS:** All right. Then we're going to add water to it to help mix it up. You're allowed to add a certain amount of water but actually, after you cook it, then most of the water cooks out. And it helps mix the seasoning up properly because if you didn't, it would be all clumped together and then you'd have like different flavors in parts of the sausage and—.

00:38:42

**Jimmy:** *[To interviewer]* Is that digital, so you never run out of film—I mean pictures?

00:38:45

**AE:** Yeah.

00:38:55

**VS:** All right. Come over here and get a picture of that—of Jimmy [grinding the pork for the andouille sausage].

00:38:57

**AE:** All right.

00:39:00

**Jimmy:** Oh, you want—does it matter if it's stopped?

*[Short pause. Recording resumes as Vaughn is still mixing the meat and seasonings together in the mixer.]*

00:39:07

**AE:** It's like a big glob, whichever you do it. *[Laughs]*

00:39:10

**VS:** We've got enough. If we close it up, it's going to mix it up real good.

00:39:12

**AE:** Okay.

00:39:13

**Jimmy:** Pick and choose which one.

00:39:14

**VS:** Well what she—what I'm going to have him do is he's going to change the grind wheel, and we're going to make an andouille next—and we're going to grind some meat, so if you want to take a picture of that, and I'll be stuffing that. So I'm going to wait until that mixes up. I'm going to set this up for stuff. These are the real natural casings from the pig that we use, and we use the real stuff. Everything—I don't thing use anything artificial over here. Want me to hold it up?

00:39:46

**AE:** Yeah.

00:39:51

**VS:** And Deanie, come hold this [casing] up for a while and take a picture of it.

00:39:55

**DB:** Oh, no! *[Laughs]*

00:39:59

**VS:** She could have been a Christian girl.

00:40:02

**AE:** I could have been; I'm not anymore. *[Laughs]*

00:40:08

**VS:** Every time she brings these women back here and tours it, she brings that up. She's like that. *[Laughs]* See, I am going to need some angle rods, so whatever you can *[background conversation, inaudible]* I want the camera right there. All right and then we have the finished product; you have crawfish green onion sausage. You can get over there closer to it, if you want. And I'm going to go get an apron. *[Short pause]* So I'm going to come load it up, and we're going to start stuffing it and hanging it on the rack.

00:40:50

**AE:** All right, all right.

*[Short pause]*

00:40:54

**DB:** Not like somebody yesterday?

00:40:54

**VS:** I did call twice; I got a busy signal, but I'll tell you someone was there.

00:41:03

**AE:** Tell me again what—how many pounds this is.

00:41:07

**VS:** Well it's 180 pounds of meat with about eighteen pounds of crawfish, and with the seasoning and the vegetables you probably end up with a little bit over 200 pounds. This—I'm pouring the meat in is the stuffing machine. We'll get that filled up. See, I got—my guy is on vacation; usually, I have younger guys doing this for me. I figured I was in the business long enough, I shouldn't have to—I don't have to pick up heavy meats anymore. You didn't bring a little video camera, huh? You could take a little movie.

00:42:36

**AE:** I know it—next time.

00:42:40

**VS:** You're welcome anytime you want.

00:42:43

**AE:** All right.

00:42:59

**VS:** Water has got to come on.

00:43:21

**AE:** So water is the pressure that moves the sausage—

00:43:24

**VS:** Hydraulics, yeah, it moves that piston up. I used to have one that was noisy. It was—it was the same thing. Just watch your feet—I got to release it [the water].

*[Vaughn begins loading the sausage mixture into the casing, making ling spirals of sausage.]*

00:44:29

**AE:** Maybe you can kind of describe what you're doing as you're doing it.

00:44:31

**VS:** If I tie it like this [*tie the end off to begin a stuffing a new casing*], then what happens—I just let it go.

00:44:36

**AE:** Okay.

00:44:38

**VS:** And then you rope it like that [*into a spiral*], and you wait until you can hang them on a smoke tray—that's a smoke rack. So after you hang up the whole thing and stuff it, we light up the smoker, roll them in, and they cook for like two-and-a-half hours to—your heat at 160-degrees. And then after that, we shower it because you need a shower to cool it down or it will stay cooking, and then it would shrivel up and really fat pockets would appear. So the shower goes on for five or ten minutes, and it cools it down. And then you sit it in the hall for maybe ten minutes and keep it from—you don't want to roll a hot product right in the cooler. And then you roll it in the cooler, and it cools down. And once it gets to forty degrees, you pack it and send it to its new home.

00:45:27

**AE:** So how many of these—?

00:45:30

**VS:** I do about three or four racks a day. But before the storm, I did six.



00:45:34

**AE:** Okay. Racks, meaning what's standing out in the hallway?

00:45:36

**VS:** Yeah. And so a whole rack maybe holds 200 pounds of—I mean, 240. I used to make them all 240 before the storm, but since it slowed down a lot, I try to keep as minimum because I like everything to be made fresh. So this has all been sold already, and it's distributed to the casinos by a distributing company. So they buy volumes, so you've got to keep them stocked up. So I make about 750 pounds a week of this crawfish green onion [sausage].

00:46:18

**AE:** So is the—the length of the coil just the length of the—?

00:46:21

**VS:** Of the intestine—

00:46:22

**AE:** —intestine that you had in there?

00:46:22

**VS:** Yeah. It comes different sizes. I mean you can't mix up with a pig's intestines. You can get them sometimes at very long and sometimes they're short, but you hope to have long ones because it makes the timing a lot quicker.

00:46:38

**AE:** How did these come to you?

00:46:39

**VS:** They get shipped in from a company. If you go read on the side—called DeWied—a company from Austin, Texas, or San Antonio; it's different companies out there that make them. What they do is they must get them out of the pig, and they flush them, clean them. How they do that, I do not know, but let's hope they do a good job at it.

00:47:03

**AE:** I don't think I really want or need to know how they do that.

00:47:04

**VS:** No, me neither.

00:47:07

**AE:** [*Laughs*] How much do those cost, if I may ask?

00:47:10

**VS:** The hang—one big bag that I just opened up, which is this size [I'm using] here, will do about 130 pounds of meat, and the cost is maybe twelve dollars a tank, which is a bag. And then you want to go over there and take a picture of him grinding meat while he's doing that?

00:47:37

**AE:** I do.

00:47:38

**VS:** Because that's going to be andouille over there that he's grinding, and you'll notice how big and chunky the meat is over there.

00:47:46

**AE:** Okay, okay.

*[Short pause]*

00:47:49

**VS:** Well I wanted to make some boudin for myself and barbecue some chicken livers and then grind that up and put that into my personal use because I love chicken livers and see how that would come out. But you know, being such a pain barbecuing the livers and doing that, and I would only do it for myself, and I haven't done it yet, but that's an idea I had.

00:48:17

**AE:** Is there a particular way to space [the coils on the rack] so they're—?

00:48:20

**VS:** Well you want them like he's got them, properly apart like that [about three or four inches]; it's better that way. The heat—when you put it in the smoker, there's blowers on each side, and the smoke comes in through a smoke generator, which I'm going to show you, which you can take some pictures of once I get in there. It gives the circulation better, so if you put them too close together, the airflow is not as good. It will cook better and get a better color.

00:48:59

**AE:** So you were talking about chorizo earlier, is that a new—are you making that—?

00:49:05

**VS:** No, chorizo—no, I'm making a chorizo and a chaurice; it's basically the same recipe. I mean, I can't tell you much difference. Maybe a chorizo might be a little chunkier like the andouille-sized grind, and chaurice we started off making into fine grind. But like I said, it's only the same sausage but one—chaurice is French and chorizo is Spanish, of course. And my father got the recipe out of a 1950-something cookbook. It was a French cookbook, and we went with that, and it's been a great hit.

00:49:37

**AE:** So are you selling the chorizo to Latino markets and restaurants?

00:49:40

**VS:** Well, I sell it mainly to the grocery stores and stuff like that. No, the Latinos, I think most of them make their own chorizo because, you know, any products that these markets have—

whatever scraps of meat they have, they'll make it for them in sausages. I try—I don't push too much of the raw products at the grocery stores because, like I said, they have their own meat, and they can make their own fresh products. And I'm not one to go up against their products, you know. If someone wants my fresh sausage, they'll come to the sausage factory for that. Plus, you have less of a shelf-life on a cooked product or if you have a smoked product. And if things spoil, you've got to take them back. So unless they freeze them, of course, but a lot of people don't do that.

00:50:20

**AE:** Are there many other sausage makers in New Orleans—or were there before the storm—and then what's the status?

00:50:25

**VS:** Well, I know a few of them got hit bad. One was in Chalmette, and he's working out of another plant in Metairie somewhere. And Kenner, of course. And then another guy named Patton, he would make hot patties and hot links, and he got with some other sausage factory and worked with them. And [inaudible], who has a great ham, and they're local, and they got back maybe—they got—a lot of them came back faster than me. And none of them offered to help me to get rolling again, you know—the retail crunch we was dominating the city—most of the sales out there; they didn't want me back. So that's why—so I just waited to build it back up and went out there and tried. And once I got all—whatever accounts I had ready back, that's what we had.

00:51:15

**AE:** So you have pretty much the same customer base you had before?

00:51:18

**VS:** Right. And more of—I'm going to get other ones because everybody has got new purchasing agents and stuff. New chefs are out there for each place, so you've got to—really go out and re-sell your product.

00:51:30

**AE:** Uh-hmm. And do you have a little retail business up front? Can people come and buy?

00:51:34

**VS:** Yes, they can walk in here any time they want. And I'll give them tours, and they come to see how we make stuff, and they sample it, if they've never been here before. People come—they drive up in their limos sometimes, you know—really. They come from all over. And they always come back.

00:51:51

**AE:** Do you have a favorite one of the sausages that you make?

00:51:54

**VS:** I think I like the green onion—the smoked green onion, which is a basic smoked sausage with chopped green onions in it. The chaurice is real good. I like the cheese and jalapeno. I think I like most of them all, really. It depends on what you're preparing to eat with them. But that

chaurice on the grill, I want to tell you—you get the right barbecue sauce on it, you're going to get—anytime they had a party out there and I brought ten or twenty pounds of chaurice, that's the first thing that disappears. And the seafood sausage I was telling you about earlier and basically—with the fish and shrimp—but if you want to go more expensive, you know, you can add scallops to it, and then you could add crawfish tails because it brings out the orange.

**[Laughs]** I'm teasing with you Jimmy. But no, it's—mainly it's the color presentation that helps out a lot, too. So if the fish is clear, I put the green onion and it gives it a green [color]. But if you have the crawfish it, will give you that orange color. And it gives it like a Mardi Gras color you know—orange, green—and it's pretty. And the scallops in there and the—little bay scallops would be cool, too. Of course, you bring the cost up, too, you know.

00:53:13

**Jimmy:** Orange isn't [a] Mardi Gras [color].

00:53:14

**VS:** It's not? Come on. **[Laughs]** All right; he's messing with me. Look, he's messing me up bad. Hey, well purple, green—all right, purple crawfish, how's that? Oh, that's it.

00:53:31

**Jimmy:** That's what you had.

00:53:32

**VS:** Help me Jimmy; help me. That's why I got you here.

00:53:37

**AE:** So I can see you kind of getting into a groove here with filling the sausages—kind of a little you know—I would think it's kind of relaxing; you get into a groove and—.

00:53:50

**VS:** Oh yeah, well we play music. We've got the oldies station, and it's great. I mean it's—when we were growing up—the kind of music you don't hear on the radio anymore—and we jam and we talk and we enjoy it. We—we—sometimes we'll play name that tune or Clem does, and I don't know most of them. Some of them are really beyond me, but we try. All right, you stand back again because I'm going to squirt—see what that will do, the water pressure? You've got to release the water, and it takes it down. And I take this [lid] off and there it goes and it keeps going up and down and to do that we fill it up. This thing holds about 100 pounds of meat at a time.

00:54:32

**AE:** When your parents started did they have this grade of equipment?

00:54:37

**VS:** The stuff—it was about basically the same. I believe it's a brand new grinder; it's a brand new mixer. This is—there's a stuffer back here that used to have a motor, but that motor was so loud and going on all the time, and I tried to find a new stuffer. And that's when Deanie told you I paid 13,000 dollars and shipped this [new one] in. But if you have that thing on the top like I do



here, it's so easy. How could you get up on the stuffer and put your knee up and lean up toward it and then, you know—that's—it was awkward for me, so we shipped it back. But I'm still going to be looking for another stuffer, as long as I can find one that I like. So until then, I'm using the—the old one, which works fine, you know.

00:55:16

**AE:** Basic.

00:55:18

**VS:** Waiting for a puddle to get out of the way. How many shops have you gone and done—or places?

**[Short pause to speak off the record]**

00:55:38

**AE:** When I was in here yesterday I saw some boxes that said “mullet roe” on them.

00:55:44

**VS:** Yeah, but that has nothing to do with us.

00:55:46

**AE:** Okay. You were just using the boxes?

00:55:47

**VS:** That was something somebody boxed up something and had sent to me because they were closing down. I hadn't—I don't use that.

00:55:57

**AE:** All right.

00:55:58

**VS:** That's something that shouldn't have been seen, let's say. There's nothing mullet[-related] in there. It's just one of the customers I had was closing down, and he had product that he couldn't get rid of, so I did a good job of going back and getting the stuff. And I'm going to credit him. Then I donate it to the Ozanam Inn, which is the food bank for the poor people and that's what—we just didn't have any boxes at the time, and that's what he had to put everything in.

00:56:23

**AE:** Yeah. Has it been hard since your reopening in finding boxes and finding spices and getting—?

00:56:29

**VS:** No, I got—my spice people are here; my box people are here, too. Everything is fine. It's just that this young—this young couple, they were in the French Market, and with the bad storm they had no business; and the business is gone, you know. So they had to close down. They lost

their other business in Chalmette, which was a big seafood industry thing. And he called me up and explained to me what the situation was and I—I understood. And instead of getting him stuck with it, you know, and—I help people out. So that was my product and he gave it back to me, which I’m not supposed to do at all; you’re not supposed to take back stuff, but it was nothing wrong with it, and it was in the freezer and—and I’m not going to sell it again. I’m going to donate it to like Ozanam Inn, the Bridge House, and they’ll cook with it and feed people that need to be fed. So and then they pack them in a box and—you’re sharp. You notice everything.

00:57:23

**AE:** Well I was curious if you had anything that you made with mullet roe.

00:57:26

**VS:** I don’t even know what that is.

00:57:28

**AE:** It’s the eggs of the mullet.

00:57:31

**VS:** Caviar, you mean?

00:57:33

**AE:** Yeah.

00:57:33

**VS:** Well that would be cool, huh? We could—I never thought of that, caviar sausage; that could be done. That would be neat: seafood sausage with the caviar in it. Now see, that—that's—. [*Laughs*]

00:57:47

**AE:** Ideas, they're happening.

00:57:49

**VS:** Yeah, that would be expensive, though.

00:57:51

**Jimmy:** No one could afford it.

00:57:51

**VS:** Yeah, really—well that blue cheese that guy put in there [in the buffalo wing sausage] was pretty expensive, too, you know because blue cheese is—I'm sure he went and bought some good cheese. I wouldn't want to just use any kind of—you know—.

00:58:08

**AE:** Is there a kind of sausage that you've always wanted to make but you never have yet?

00:58:11

**VS:** I tried to think of it. I think about it all the time. And like I love that cheese—and that cheese and jalapeno [sausage] comes out the smoker—it is so good because it's fresh cheddar cheese, and it's shredded so it's not like it's ground up; and then I've got chunks of jalapenos in there, and it has a great flavor—it really does. And the Crescent City Brew House, I've got together with the owner over there, and we make a German sausage. *[To Jimmy, who is hanging the extruded sausage on a rack]* Watch out Jimmy, we're breaking [a casing]. Get a log and put that in there; we'll wash it off. Sometimes if we get some bad skins [or casings], and they'll break like that—ust put the whole thing in there—in that bucket right there. I'm going to rework that, and we don't want to take a chance on—.

00:59:07

**AE:** How will you do that? Will you squeeze it out of the casing and—?

00:59:11

**VS:** Well, I'll go and patch up the hole. I'll check and make sure that it is the skin or whatever. See, I'll do it like this—watch. *[Vaughn squeezes out some of the sausage filling from the broken end of the casing.]* We'll retie it, and then what I'll do is check it out. *[Checks the rest of the casing for holes or breaks]* *[To Jimmy]* This hadn't hit the floor, though, did it? **[Jimmy shakes head “no.”]** All right because I'll have—see, what they tell you when anything drops in the floor, as long as it's not the ground meat [outside of the casing] like that you—you can throw that away. But see, this—I make them too big sometimes and they're hard to handle, you know,

and they'll slip by—and they're not thick. Some of them are real hard, and some of them aren't.

*[An inspector walks in the sausage-making room.]* Hey Bob, how is it going?

**Bob:** Y'all are working hard today.

00:59:45

**VS:** We're interviewing here. **[To interviewer]** That's my meat inspector. **[To Bob, the inspector]** Come on in for a minute.

00:59:51

**AE:** Hi, Bob.

00:59:49

**VS:** She's—she's a student at Ole Miss.

00:59:54

**AE:** Let me pause this. *[Short pause. Bob leaves, and the interview resumes]* So I read that you had a sausage at the New Orleans Worlds Fair.

00:59:58

**VS:** We had two groups over there, and that was one of my father's gigs. And what happened was, we sold Italian sausage and peppers, which was real good. You know, you sauté your peppers and onions and put Italian sausage on a little peewee bun, and that always is good. Of

course, you get all these other weird things like potato skins and all these things, but nobody made money out there. It wasn't—you know, it was a fun time; it was a great time, I thought, you know to go see the Worlds Fair. It was in my backyard. But the volume of people you need to make money at a Worlds Fair is phenomenal and it just—nobody has that. That's why—I don't think they have Worlds Fairs anymore. Have you heard about any—any more?

01:00:37

**AE:** You know, I don't really know.

01:00:39

**VS:** I haven't heard about them at all but it was—it was very fun to do and experience. And we'd go out there every night because every night they'd have fireworks displays right on the river, so at nine o'clock we'd be out there watching and then go back home. During the week—what?

01:00:56

**AE:** Do you do any festivals or anything. Do you do Jazz Fest or—?

01:00:58

**VS:** Oh yeah, we go to Jazz Fest every year; I do Mardi Gras every year. I mean, we go down to the French Quarter every morning for Mardi Gras, and we go have breakfast to Royal Orleans and then sit right there on Royal Street and watch people go by in their different costumes, and we have a blast. We walk—

01:01:14

**AE:** But you go for fun. You don't sell your sausages?

01:01:16

**VS:** Oh no, I just sell to major hotels and restaurants and—and I tried to work six days a week but other than that—Jazz Fest and things like that—I just play. I don't believe in working—you know, living work is not the way I want to do it. Some people—we're going to get a Jazz Fest booth. Well why don't you get the booth and you can buy the sausage?

01:01:39

**AE:** [*Laughs*] What are those rings that are sitting in the [vat of] casings?

01:01:43

**VS:** Each one will tell me which size it is. A brown ring says it's a 35-38; a pink ring says it's a 42-44; and then the little—what's the other pink color? Orange ring is a 19 to 22 or something like that.

01:02:00

**AE:** Well what are those numbers, 19 and 22?

01:02:01

**VS:** They're the size.



01:02:03

**AE:** Like a circumference?

01:02:04

**VS:** Yeah You see, that's a 35-38 [I'm using], which is the size—I don't know, just the size they tell me, but it looks like it's a smoked sausage size. The 42-44 is a bigger one that we make the andouille with. and it's a bigger size than that. And then the little 19 one is a smaller one that I use for breakfast sausages; that would be about that big.

01:02:24

**AE:** Like your finger?

01:02:26

**VS:** Like a link. You know, little baby sausages.

01:02:30

**AE:** Yeah. Well what do you think—I know it's hard to talk about the future, since you just got back on your feet again and thinking about today—but what is the future of Creole Country Sausage?

01:02:41

**VS:** What you mean?

01:02:42

**AE:** Like, you know, are you going to expand your business or have another storefront?

01:02:47

**VS:** Oh, the future. Oh, okay. I'm just going to rebuild it to the way it was before and play the game. It's fun. I'm not worried about being the biggest sausage person in the world. I just want to be happy and make a good living. I mean I can't see me as being one of the big Hillshire Farms and Jimmy Dean and all that. I like to be small and local and be a hands-on. Once you get too, too big, your quality goes away—inconsistency—and it wouldn't be fun then, you know. The main thing is being in here and having a good time and being the size that we are. So if I can meet the size that I was during the—before the hurricane, I'd be totally happy. I mean if business comes my way and it's big, I'll take it. If I can't handle it, I'll figure out a way to do it. But I'm not looking to be as big as these big companies. I mean my dream is just to have fun and enjoy life and make a nice business, you know.

I've got a little more to do, Jimmy.

**[Short pause]**

But this is the pink ring. Since we've got—there's a little bit left to make, and I will just cheat a little bit. Instead of getting the brown ring out—.

01:04:03

**AE:** So you think New Orleans is special in that the food culture kind of demands and respects these small food purveyors?

01:04:11

**VS:** Yeah, it's—it's more fun that way. I think most of the restaurants and hotels, when I came back they—they mostly came back to me, and it's loyalty and they're—they're all family businesses also; they've been in the family, you know, in business for a long time. The big hotels, I was with them with the Restaurant Association and the Chefs Association and—and helped out a lot. I mean I can't even mention all the people I was in business with so—. *[Talking about the sausage casing]* Look how much [meat] I had left [to extrude]. *[Laughs]*

01:04:41

**AE:** *[Laughs]* About eight inches; that's it, huh?

01:04:45

**VS:** I don't remember what the question was.

01:04:47

**AE:** Small food purveyors in New Orleans?

01:04:49

**VS:** Oh, yeah.

01:04:51

**AE:** Kind of home businesses and not big manufacturers and—New Orleans food culture is kind of demanding that, you know, with the—.

01:04:58

**VS:** Well most of them are. I've even caught some of them buying stuff from up north. All right, let me get these in the smoker.

01:05:04

**AE:** Okay. *[Short pause as Vaughn loads his fresh sausage into the smoker]* All right, now we're in the kitchen [which is also the office] with the gumbo [that Vaughn made].

01:05:08

**VS:** All right, we're in the gumbo. And this is my mother's recipe—what I explained to you earlier. And we just like boiled the chicken with the vegetables; we pulled the chicken out, we shredded it, and then I got the roux and I took the chicken—I shredded the chicken and took the chicken out, of course, and put the roux in there, and then we made the roux come out and—look, she's in the way *[talking about Deanie]*. But anyway—we'll just start over with this.

01:05:37

**AE:** *[Laughs]*

01:05:40

**VS:** *[To Deanie]* You want some Gumbo? But anyway we started with the roux. After we put the roux in there, I added the chicken back with the sausage and cooked that all down, and then at the end I added some okra and tomato. Anything else in there, Deanie?

01:05:55

**DB:** Um-um.

01:05:56

**AE:** What sausage are you putting in there?

01:05:58

**VS:** Smoked sausage, the same stuff Billy [Grueber] put in his.

01:06:00

**AE:** Uh-hmm, all right.

01:06:02

**DB:** Keep an eye on this.

01:06:10

**AE:** All right, Vaughn, I think we maybe can put an ending on this, if you have some final thoughts about sausage making.

01:06:16

**VS:** Well this is—a lot of people get out there and eat it and cook with it for me, please, and enjoy it.

01:06:20

**AE:** All right.

01:06:21

**[End Vaughn Schmitt Interview]**