Ernest Bracewell, Billy Bracewell, and Bryan Bracewell

Southside Market, Elgin, Texas

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Southern Foodways Alliance
&
American Studies Department
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Group Members:
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[BEGIN]

[BEGIN, Part 1 of Interview] 00:00:00

Eric Covey: Alright, we're recording. This is Eric Covey. It's the eighteenth of June, 2007. It's about 8:30 in the morning out here at Southside Market in Elgin, Texas—talking to Ernest, Billy, and Bryan Bracewell. If you folks could for me, could you just go ahead and say your names and birthdays?

Ernest Bracewell: Ernest Bracewell, two, eight, thirty.

Billy Bracewell: Billy Bracewell September 23, 1955.

Bryan Bracewell: Bryan Bracewell September 6, 1975.

EC: OK. Let's go ahead and maybe start with kind of a—uh—a big question here that I hope you can kind of fan off of. Can you tell me about the history of Southside Market?

EB: Well this, I can go from 1968, but I can tell you what I had been told back many years before because we had a fellow working for me. His name was Bud Frazier and he was in from about the start of Southside Market. And when it started out, they butchered cattle and they brought the meat and stuff into town on wagons and delivered to the homes because they didn't have refrigeration, so. It was a butcher today, deliver today. And that was the real start of

Southside Market. And then, on through the years, they added sausage and meat counters, when it, you know, and it just kept growing since then. And there's been a lot of changes in Southside since the start of it.

EC: OK. What are some of the changes?

EB: Well they got refrigeration, you know, and everything modern, you know, to bring up the meat so it will stay fresh and you keep it longer. And—uh—people come in and by it—were used to, it was very slow. This was a country town, a farming town, and most of the people wouldn't come to town except on Fridays and Saturdays. That's when the meat market really had to—to get together and sell their meat. And anything like that leftover, it was, you know, sometimes they sell it and sometimes they didn't. But then they started sausage. And that started out like on Fridays and Saturdays when the farmers come in, and—uh—that was something to eat besides going to the other cafes. And—uh—it started there and it's been going ever since.

Bryan: Who were the first typical customers? Farmers and Ranchers?

EB: Farmers and Ranchers around here.

Bryan: What was it that they farmed?

EB: Cotton. The main thing was cotton back then. And they had lots of field help. A lot of these farmers around here had eight—six, eight, ten houses, shacks really where the workers would

come in, work their crops, and have a place to stay. It wasn't luxury, but there wasn't no luxury back then. So, that's really what got the market started.

EC: OK. So, in the beginning it was the farming. How has—how have—who eats at Southside Market now?

EB: Pardon?

EC: Who eats at Southside Market now?

EB: Anybody that's got the money to come here ***[laughs]***. Everybody.

EC: Everybody?

EB: Yes.

Bryan: On a typical day, we'll have, you know, blue collared workers, sitting next to housewives, sitting next to guys in suits and ties. You know, that's one thing neat about Central Texas barbecue and barbecue all over the country, I think, is that everybody likes it, you know, and there's no rules—no discrimination. Everybody comes in and sits down and eats with their fingers right beside each other. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from.

EC: OK. And how many people have owned Southside over the years?

EB: Really—uh—four. Let's see, you had Moons, and then you had Wilson, and then you had the Stach brothers, and then you had the Stach with the—who was it?—Zimmerhanzels, Charlie and Monroe Stabeno, and then I bought it from the Staches in 1968 and owned it ever since.

00:05:06

EC: OK. Why do—what made you decide to own a barbecue restaurant?

EB: Well, I was working for Armor and Company. And I was calling on this place. And they kept asking me, "Did you want to—Do you want to buy this? Do you want to buy this?" They were trying to sell it to me. And in the mean time, Armor and Company was shutting down a lot of their territory, their salesmen, and everything, and they were just getting thinner and thinner. And I figured, well Ernest, this is your time to either get out and get on the bandwagon or go find something else to do. So, I found a lender, and got me some money together, and I bought it. I've been here ever since.

EC: Were you from Elgin originally?

EB: No. I'm originally born in Stockdale, Texas. But I moved from San Antonio to Austin, and I was still calling on this place. And then, when I got the money, I just moved from Austin to Elgin, which is where I am still today.

EC: And when you purchased Southside in 1968? Was it—was this the building it was in then?

EB: No, no. It was downtown Elgin, 109 Central. And over the years, it moved downtown to three different buildings. The last move was 109, 107 Central. That's when the Staches bought it, and they put in, you know, better coolers, and counters. And back—in the back end where you could eat, at first it was dirt floors. Back in the barbecue area it wasn't—then they put concrete in there. And so, they just kept going. And then in—years later I put—added another dining room to it so I could—we could serve more customers. And then we had a fire. And then we rebuilt and moved from downtown to out here on highway in 1992. And we were here ever since.

EC: OK. Other than the location, what else has changed in the business over the years?

Bryan: Well, the business started as, you know, a small town butcher shop. And the barbecue was just a derivative of having fresh meat on hand, you know, back before the days of refrigeration. In 1882, when William Moon started butchering animals and bringing them to town, they had a short window of time where they either had to get it sold, get it in somebody's tummy, or—uh—preserve it in some way. And so they only ways to preserve it back then were either salting it or—uh—cooking it. And so, the barbecue restaurant is just a—really a derivative of having fresh meat on hand. Uh, so, from '82 until '86, the business was operating like that with barbecue, sausage, and everything on the weekends. And then in '86, William Moon started the first, I guess, storefront Southside Market in—on Central Street in downtown Elgin. And—uh—he owned that location for that business until 1908 when Lee Wilson purchased it. That's about the time that I think Bud Frazier started working, somewhere in there, who worked with Southside until the early '70s, I guess. He had worked for Southside his entire life. From 1908 until 1942, which was Lee Wilson's time period—uh—Bud Frazier owned it—owned the

business several times during that, but it always had reverted back to—uh—Lee Wilson. And—uh—correct me if I'm wrong, but Bud Frazier had told y'all that several times he would come to work on a Thursday morning and the business had changed hands in a Wednesday night card games. Is that right?

EB: Yes, that's true. That's what he told me. He'd come to work on Thursday, and sometime who's the boss, you know. It'd be a different one. And next week, it might be a different one. But usually Lee Wilson would win it back, someway or another, I don't know, but it was lost several times in the poker games. And the poker house that they played in was out there just about three quarters of a mile from where we butcher. So, it was out in the middle of nowhere, you know. And they—they always had the big card games. It was win, lose, or draw. And so, that's the way it went then.

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Bryan: So from—during the Lee Wilson era, the business kind of had a colorful past. And Bud Frazier worked through all that, but Lee Wilson ultimately maintained control of the business and in 1942 he sold the business to Jerry Stach, Monroe Stabeno, and Charlie and Van Zimmerhanzel, who were brothers. They bought it from Lee Wilson in '42 and they—uh—built a new slaughter plant at the site of the original slaughter plant, which is still standing today, just mainly a slab. We built a barn on top of the original slab from 1882. But in '42 they built a larger slaughter plant, and kind of expanded the operation on FM 1704, which is about a mile to a mile and a half from the Central Street location, where the retail business was at. So, those partners owned the business until '48, and—uh—Jerry Stach bought out his other partners and then

brought on his brother, Edwin Stach, to join him. And the two Stach brothers ran the business until ’68. And then in 1968, what was it, September 1?

EB: Yep. That’s correct.

Bryan: September 1 is when—uh—my grandma and grandpa bought the business and moved the family down to Elgin. That was, I guess, my dad’s first—uh—first day to work in the business as well. He was right at twelve years old, which coincidentally was the same age that I was when I started working in the business. And in the early days, when you bought it, what were the main menu items? Or the—first of all the restaurant was the small part of the business and the butcher shop was—

EB: Yes. That’s right. The main menu for the barbecue was sausage—sausage, sausage, sausage. We had a little beef—had beefsteaks and porksteaks and a few things like that, but the main thing was sausage. It has always been sausage, it still is sausage today. It’s the main item. So—

Bryan: So mainly the—the small town butcher shop. And y’all slaughtered—uh—pigs and calves out the slaughter plant and brought them up into town to Central Street. And—uh—were just the small town butcher shop really servicing the Elgin community.

EB: We just served the community around here—all people that had cattle and wanted it to be butchered and put it in their own home freezer. We would butcher them, cut them up, wrap them, freeze them, and they could take it home. And that’s the way it went for a good while. And then

it got to the point where fewer people were butchering and putting it in their freezer. They'd rather go to the store and buy it and cook it day to day than—in fact, the cooking methods changed so that the ladies don't have time to go home and thaw out a bunch of meat and then cook it because they're working. And so, they like to have it ready to go.

Bryan: So, in the beginning, most of the slaughtering that y'all did was on custom basis. Farmer and ranchers would bring their animals in and then y'all slaughtered it for them. And then you also slaughtered Southside's own animals for the—for the meat case. So, from the roots of being a small town butcher shop, over time, it derived it to where the barbecue restaurant took over. I think it was—wasn't it the early '70s when y'all added brisket to the menu?

EB: Yes. We added brisket to the menu and just—you know every time—and pork ribs and items like that. So, people had a variety of—just besides sausage. They could have other meat to if they wanted. And that's where we changed the whole concept of Southside Market. It's regular barbecue, and they can choose, like I say, just not just one item like it used to be, but many more items to eat.

Bryan: Now when you bought the business in '68 there was a dividing wall down the center of the restaurant. Isn't that right?

EB: Yes. That's true.

Bryan: It was for—it was during the—when everything was segregated. Basically blacks were on one side and whites were on the other.

EB: Correct.

00:15:00

Bryan: And that—that was still that way in ’68 when you bought it?

EB: The wall was still there, but—uh—they could eat on either side they wanted to in ’68. It wasn’t designated as one side or the other, but—uh—it was there. The wall was there until we had the fire in ’83.

EC: What happened with the fire?

EB: Well, it was January 3, I think it is. And it was about—what time?

Billy: We got the call at about one o’clock in the morning.

EB: About one o’clock in the morning and the market was on fire. And—uh—really, we finally found out that the fire started from shooting bottle rockets down there in the alley and landed on top of the building. And there was a pecan tree there besides the building. Those leave had built up next to a vent up there, and that’s where really the fire started.

EC: So, the fire didn’t have anything to do with you folks cooking brisket?

EB: Nothing. Nothing to do with it. They tried to—uh—the insurance company was saying the barbecue pit started the fire, but we had a video of the fire, of which the state inspector said that's the first time they ever saw a video of a fire getting started. And the barbecue pit was one of the last things to catch on fire. So, it changed their decision real fast when they saw the movie.

EC: That's interesting. OK. I have a question. Actually, I have three generations here obviously, so how—how did it turn out that all three of you ended up involved with the barbecue restaurant.

EB: Well, I bought if for a living, you know, to make a living. And so, I—like I said, I thought my job with the Armor and Company was going to play out, which I'm sure it would have in another six months of a year because they closed it down. And so, I just went to work and think, well I'll work for myself. And then—

Billy: I basically grew up, and—um—that's all I've ever known—had an apron put on me at twelve years old and been doing it ever since. That's basically how I got into it.

Bryan: For me, it was like my dad growing up in it. And I remember eating at the old restaurant prior to the fire in '83, and I was born in '75. So I was pretty young, I mean, it was just part of the way of our life. You know—uh—the uh—we call it The Market. My dad worked in The Market, my mom worked in The Market off and on, when she wasn't keeping us. And so, it was just part of a way of life. I grew up never having to decide or think what I was going to do in life, just knew that I was going to be here. I took a break for four years, went to Texas A&M, studied

food science—meat science—and then came back a hung around a little bit too long and they put me to work, but I don't ever remember making a conscious decision to work here or not to work here. It just kind of happened, I think, you know.

EB: It's just something you're supposed to do.

Bryan: I think from time to time, you know, what if they would have been firefighters, policemen, or whatever, you know? Would my life be different now? I don't know. It's kind of—I just never had to go through that decision making process. And while I was at A&M, it was kind of neat. I was able to take a lot of classes that I could apply directly to this place. I went to A&M and got out of A&M in a period of change in the meat industry for the whole United States. It's when the Clinton administration introduced the HAACP Program and mandated that everybody go under HAACP—uh—inspection. And that was right at the time when I had gotten out of A&M. So, it was kind of a, a pretty—pretty good timing because I don't know if grandpa would have had the patience or would have wanted to mess with all the regulations because they've gotten more stringent over the years. It was in the early '70s, wasn't it, when y'all first had to go under state inspection?

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EB: Oh, well we—early '70s, yeah. But that didn't bother me. That part didn't because I had been working with the Armor Company under inspection all those years, and you know, that wasn't no big deal, but—uh—then when the Clinton come by and they put that HAACP in there, now that was a different story. You had to sit down and figure out all that kind of stuff, and I don't know, they sort of went against the grain. I happened to have a grandson that was in on it,

so he come in at a big time—the right time to do it. So he's the man that's responsible mainly for the HAACP plan.

EC: OK. Can you maybe give us some details on how the inspection process works and how that bill affected you folks?

EB: We—um—we have an inspector, like when you butcher, you know, we have a man that has to be there at all times when you butchered or you couldn't butcher. And they inspect in your place for cleanness and all that during the day, and if you do something wrong they write you up. And—uh—but they mainly—it's the sanitation was for the meat industry, which didn't have too much regulation, you know, but they put a lot of teeth in it and it's changed a whole lot since then. It's still going. I don't know when they're going to stop it. But anyway, if they're ever going to stop it.

Bryan: Yeah. The inspection program that was started in the '70s that they went under was more of a, you know, government sponsored, and they sent out inspections who knew the law and enforced it. And that method was more of a poke and sniff type deal is what they called it, where they walked around and made sure you were in compliance. And—uh—if you started to stray a little bit, they made sure that they bared their teeth and got you back in line. Uh, what happened in, I guess it was probably the mid-90s, when Jack In the Box had the *E. coli* outbreak in Washington State, and I don't—you know, several children died from that and so what happened with these consumer groups is they marched on—uh—the White House and said, "You know, the meat that killed our babies had the government's inspection stamp on it. So, help us out here.

What's going on?" So the government's response to that was to walk away—uh—from the poke and sniff method of insuring that the meat was safe, and transferred the liability—their goal, I think, was to transfer the liability back onto the processor. And so what happened, I think it was January of 2001 or 2000, we had to go under HAACP Inspection. We developed our own inspection program based on guidelines that they had set for us, and we wrote if from beginning to end, and then we enforce it, and we prove to the government how we enforce it and keep all of our products safe and unadulterated. And so, the inspector's role transferred from kind of putting their stamp of approval on the products to checking paperwork and making sure that we were doing what we said we were going to do on a plan that was, not necessarily approved by the government, but was—met the requirements. So that is kind of how—how things have changed, put more of the burden on the processor. And the fear was, in the beginning, that a lot of the smaller places would go out of business for lack of resources and lack of expertise. But, you know, around here the government worked real well with us, and I don't think that anybody was put out of business due to that, it just really made you step up to the plate.

EB: Yeah. That's true there because, you know, you had to do it right and in the past, like I say, you know, you had a free hand do what you wanted to, and you know, most people in business wouldn't do that, but you have some every now in then that are going to do that. And that caused a whole big headache for a whole big industry. And so, that's what brought a lot of this on. And so we're—like I say, it put some of them out of business, but they didn't go by guidelines or things like that and—uh—sanitation. And this way, you know, it put the burden on the packers and the processors, and if they don't do it right they shut them down.

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EC: OK. How do you make an Elgin hot sausage?

EB: Well ***[Laughs]*** you get some beef. You chop it up sort of fine and you throw it up on the table. Then you spread your seasoning on it and then that was the way we used to do it. And so, now it's still about the same method, except you put it in a big mixer, and put your seasoning in there, and the mixer mixes it up. And then from there, you go to the grinder, and you grind it, and then you put it in your hopper or where you want it, and then you put it into your stuffer. And then you stuff it into pork casings. So, that's the way you make sausage.

EC: So other than the casing, the sausage is all beef.

EB: That's true. It's all beef except for the pork casing. And the reason you want pork casing is that pork casing are tenderer. Beef casings are tough and people don't really like tough casings. And then they have a synthetic, but—uh—that is another one that get's touch as a boot too.

EC: And what do you season the sausage with?

EB: Well—uh—spices, salt and pepper and spices.

EC: Have you always used the same seasoning for the hot sausage?

EB: Yes sir. All time, same seasoning. We have cut back on the red pepper, where it used to be real hot. And so we cut back on the red pepper where more people could eat it. A lot of people

couldn't eat that hot sausage. That's where it really got its name, but we cut back on the red pepper where everybody can eat it. I'd rather have a whole bunch of people eating it than just a few.

EC: And how long does it take to make a batch of sausage?

Bryan: Well, I can't speak on the olden days, but now we can grind 300 pounds of sausage—uh—take it from the whole muscle form to ground in 90 seconds, add our seasonings, we'll mix it from about five to seven minutes to get a good mix on the seasoning, and then we'll grind it out again, which it will take a couple of minutes, three minutes, just to do that, and then we start stuffing it. So, from the time we start weighing the formulation until we're actually stuffing sausage, you know, you're looking at close to ten or twelve minutes. And you can have that 300 pounds stuffed in probably 15 to 20 more minutes, when you stuff all that with—with our current equipment.

EB: Well, used to, it would take—well, let's go for a full day's work—you'd put your meat in and all that and get it mixed up and we had 150 pound batches, that's all we could make at one time because we only had a 100 pound stuffer. And it was our stuffer and the—it was just slow, but it got us by then. Our stuffer was pretty good compared to a lot of them.

EC: How much could you make in a day back then?

EB: Oh, about 1200 pounds was about the most.

EC: What can you make in a day now?

Bryan: We—we can run 1200 pounds of sausage easy. You know, I would say, probably, if we really maxed out, we could probably stuff close to 20,000 pounds of sausage today—in one day.

EC: And does the factory run seven days a week?

EB: No. You run full—five days a week because of the inspection. You can run a little longer, but you have to pay overtime to the inspection. But you're allowed, what, forty hours a week and that's it.

EC: OK. And how many pounds of sausage are you producing a year at this point?

Bryan: Well, we produced about 2,000,000 pounds of sausage last year and we hope to add another quarter to a half this year based on the growth of the distribution company.

EC: And how much of that sausage is consumed by folks that visit the restaurant?

Bryan: The majority of our sausages ship—um—you know to grocery stores, retail outlets, other food service restaurants, things like that. But—uh—a lot of the sausage is consumed here, either sold through the butcher shop as—in its fresh form or we take the fresh sausage and barbecue it. On a busy Saturday, we'll barbecue 2,000 pounds of sausage. And on a Sunday, you know, 1,500

1,800 pounds is a good—that's a good weekend. We'll go through 3500, 3,800 pounds of sausage. The busiest—uh—day we've ever had in the fresh meat market was the third of July a few years back. We sold over 7,000 pounds of fresh sausage over—in our butcher shop. Um—so, I don't know, do the math. We go through quite a bit of sausage.

00:30:09

EC: OK. What's the best way to eat one of those sausages?

EB: Well, put it down on a piece of butcher paper and get you a knife, and I put hot sauce on it and a fork really. Used to we didn't have forks and knives—we had knives but no forks. You eat with your fingers, but—uh—I like it—just put the hot sauce on it and eating my sausage and crackers.

EC: Can you tell me a little bit more about the crackers?

EB: Well, they something have been—uh—a lot of places don't use crackers. But it was something here ever since day one. And that I know of, they said that years ago—that the sausage was so greasy that they put it on paper, they crumbled up their crackers with it because it sogged the juice, and they eat the crackers from there. So, that was the story behind the crackers.

EC: OK. What kind of—uh—sides to y'all serve with the barbecue here?

EB: We serve—uh—potato salad, and beans, and coleslaw as our sides. Until '92, we never served—1992—we never served any sides with our meat. It was just meat by the pound and then

pickles, peppers, and onions were the only vegetables you would find. So when we moved out here in ’92 with the new digs, we kind of fancied up a little bit and introduces plates and the full lines of utensils and side items.

EC: And what’s the best thing to drink with an Elgin hot sausage?

EB: Well Big Red is, I guess, still the favorite. Isn’t it?

Billy: Yeah.

EB: Big Red soda water.

Carly Kocurek: Why do you think it’s Big Red because I’ve heard that a bunch, and, you know, that’s just famous Texas stuff? But why do y’all suppose that is? What makes that just such a perfect combination?

EB: Don’t ask me. That’s just something that’s been going on for a long time, Big Red. And—uh—for years Big Red and orange, and like say *the other soda.* And we always had a certain clientele for RC Cola. We had, for years, we’d sell four or five cases of RC Cola. And—uh—like I said, Dr. Pepper for a long time wasn’t a drink, but it was Big Red and orange and then we added tea to it here, so, you know, it’s just sort of a change where everybody can get what they want. But used to it was just Big Red, Big Red.

Bryan: Wasn't Big Red bottled in San Antonio?

EB: Yeah. Well, at first Big Red was—it was—they called it Big Red, but it was really a strawberry soda water. And we bought it from 7Up Company, and I don't know where it was manufactured, but then it was—they distributed it. Suncrest was the name of it, and—uh—Sunkist, Suncrest I don't remember. It's been so long ago. But—uh—that was—everybody come in and got Big Red. They called it Big Red then. So, finally they quit shipping—uh—the strawberry soda water. Then when Big Red come in, we've been with them ever since.

EC: OK—um—how did Elgin become the sausage capital of Texas?

EB: Well, the production of sausage here—we got another plant here in town and—uh—but mainly it was due to the barbecue and—uh—I don't know who all put it together, but they went to the state, and I think the city—I know the city was in on it. And they approved that this was the sausage capital of Texas.

EC: OK—uh—a lot of barbecue restaurants sell Elgin hot sausage. Is all that hot sausage from—from Southside?

EB: Uh—I wish it was, but it's not. You've got a lot of copy cats.

EC: A lot of copy cats. Do you also find that a lot of barbecue restaurants sell sausage that they maybe claim as their own but it is yours actually?

EB: True. Very true.

EC: OK. Uh—now what about the brisket? What time do y'all start cooking your brisket?

00:34:56

Bryan: We—on a normal day, we will start cooking briskets at about 5:00 pm. It's when we put the fire on. And then—uh—they'll cook all night long and be ready to serve the next morning. Throughout the night, the fire dies down a little bit. So, we try to keep it at about between 200, 225 degrees. But we don't have people here all night with the brisket. So, the fire does die down and we come back in at about 6:30 in the morning to start the fires back up, and the brisket will finish off between 8:00 and 10:00 am. We'll start pulling small ones off at about 8:00. And the goal there is to—uh—always serve fresh barbecue. And so we try to cook the briskets—uh—you know, for the day's production.

EC: And about how much brisket do you sell every day?

Bryan: We—we've got the capacity to cook—really on our two pits, our rotisseries, we've got the capacity to cook about 120 briskets. Uh—we'll normally cook about 50 to 60 briskets on any given day, and then on the weekends we've got to load up more than that. We'll go through 100, 120 briskets on a weekend day.

EC: OK. And who—who built your—your pits and your rotisserie setup.

Bryan: The rotisserie is a—from J&R Manufacturing. It's an older barbecue pit that is made in Mesquite, Texas. Uh—the—we've got two of those, one of them on wheels that we can take with us anywhere and the other one is bolted to the slab. And the building was built around that pit actually with the other barbecue pit—um—and that we called the flat pit the sausage pit. It's got a long flat grilles with fire boxes in all four corners. That pit was built by a man in Taylor.

EB: Taylor, Texas. Taylor Manufacturing Sheet Metal, you know, built it.

Bryan: That—that was your design.

EB: Yeah. Yes. It was all mine.

Bryan: So, we have two different cooking applications because we like to cook the sausage a little bit hotter, 300 to 325 degrees, than we do the other meats. And so we—uh—need different fire boxes for the different types of meat that we're cooking.

CK: I know you said you designed that pit. What—um—so it's a custom piece. What went into that to make that one exactly what you wanted?

EB: ***[Laughs]*** A lot of thinking and from the old pit, the goods and the bads about it, and how to put this one together. And you wake up at night and think that ain't right, changing. So, I went over there, and we had the plans drawed out. And—uh—so, he told me, he said, "Now, I'll build this pit for you, but you're going to tell me what to do because I will not get involved with

designing it. You're going to have to design it." So, I don't know it. It just happened to be the way I thought it should be, and it turned out fine. It's a good cooking pit.

CK: Have y'all ever had a pit you didn't like?

EB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes ***[Laughs]***. The one downtown before we had the fire—uh—it was only a two-door pit, but the front part would be 250 degrees and the back part would be 125 degrees. Why it would be in four-foot space be so much difference. But it was not a very good pit—you put your sausage on back in the backside, then you had to roll it to the front to get it done.

EC: I know y'all said you cook with oak. Where do you get the oak wood at?

Bryan: We get it from—uh—just local folks cut it for us here. We've had several different ones—uh—people over the last few years. A.D. Sweatt used to cut it for us in McDade, Texas and now—uh—Leroy Ott, I believe his name is, he cuts it for us south of Bastrop. And we use the oak wood mainly because that's what's indigenous in this part of Texas, and it's readily available. And so we buy it from Leroy at I believe about 100 cords at a time. Contract him for 100 cords and he cuts it, stacks it for us, and then we bring it on site.

00:39:33

EC: And how long does it take you to move through a cord of wood or 100 cords of wood?

Billy: Right now we're using roughly about three cords a week. So, usually what about every—uh—we're using about 100 to 150 cords a year right now.

EC: OK, now, so you get your—that's where you get your wood—how about you're meet for the sausage, and the brisket, and everything?

Bryan: Uh—our—our beef for the sausage comes from—you know, used to they would slaughter all their own beef for all their meat products in the butcher shop and the sausage. And as the—the sausage part of the business grew, I think they said in the late '70s, early '80s they started bringing in boxed meat. And that's grown to, from 50 to 60 pounds boxes, to now we buy the meat in combos, which is 1,500 to 2,000 pound big combo boxes that sit on a palette of boneless beef. We get that from the major packers. There are some here in the state of Texas that we buy from, and then there's the big boys of the world, the IBPs, the XLs, Monford National Beef, um Cargille. We buy a lot of meat from them. Um—and the way it works now—the way our beef industry is—just because you're buying from a plant, a beef plant in Texas, those cattle may have been raised in Florida or California or anywhere in between. And, you know, also if you buy out of state, it could be Texas cattle you're buying. So we don't necessarily claim—we don't claim at all Texas beef. But once we grind it here we claim Texas sausage.

EC: OK—uh—now obviously the business has expanded quite a bit. In what ways would you like to see the business expand in the future?

Bryan: He's the boss. He ought to tell us.

EB: Well, I'd like to see the sausage business grow and grow. That's the main business here, and also the barbecue and then the wholesale to the retail markets throughout the state and throughout the country.

EC: When do you start selling the sausage at places like HEB [a regional grocery chain] and so forth?

Billy: It was in the—uh—early seventies. The exact dates I can't really tell you, but by the time I got out of high school we were—we were delivering all over central Texas. That was in the early seventies.

CK: Did—um—did you guys propose that to them or did somebody approach ya'll about distributing those place?

Billy: We—all the grocery stores, retail outlets, that we went to—we went to them. Um—restaurants and stuff—uh—we either went to them or they had called us to try to get our product in their stores or in their restaurants.

CK: What's the furthest away that your sausage goes?

Bryan: We—we ship it wholesale. Uh—we have restaurants—we have one restaurant, Big Lew's in Washington State. We have Captial Q's in Washington D.C., Dinosaur Barbecue in New York City, a place in Connecticut uses the product as well. So we have—we ship it to

restaurants all over the country. And then to individuals, we have online business, so anybody can—can purchase it from anywhere in the world really. But, do to the shelf life of the product and, you know, the perishable nature, its hard to get it to Hawaii or Alaska or—uh—outside the country, through customs and everything. But we can go to like Canada with the proper paperwork. So, basically we ship our products, our sausage products, all over the country.

EC: And that you know of, what's the farthest that someone's come to—to come here to—to eat your sausage?

EB: I know they've been here form England and South America. I just can't name all the countries, you know, that have been here—Japan. I don't know. You know some of these groups just come in, they all over the country.

Bryan: We've had some trade organizations come through. One from Australia or New Zealand or both came through in the—

Billy: Was it—I believe it was Texas beef council that was bringing a lot of people around. Wasn't it? And they were from Brazil, Argentina, New Zealand. It was been from everywhere.

Bryan: Just a few weeks back, the beef council brought a media group from Japan through, and we showed them—gave them a tour of the operation—showed them how we make Texas barbecue. And so—uh—the thing about barbecue in general and then central Texas barbecue is everybody does it different. And so, there's a lot of interest from across the country and across

the world to find out, you know, how do you do it, what makes it best, and all this kind of stuff. In this business, you've got to have thick skin. I think everybody thinks theirs is the best and their way of doing it the best. And then, not only that, but everybody thinks they can do it better in their own backyard. So, you know, our goal is to just put a good quality, consistent product on the plate every day, and then let the chips fall where they may.

EB: I've got to go. I've got a doctor's appointment.

CK: Well, I certainly understand that.

EC: OK. All right. Well I guess we can—

CK: Will you shut that off for a minute, and I can take some pictures just real quick, if y'all don't mind. Maybe, can we go out, just because we're trying to get you guys together at least before—

[End, Part 1 of Interview] **00:45:54**

[Begin Part 2, of Interview] **00:00:00**

EC: And we are back live at Southside Market.

CK: OK. Um, I just have questions because you said some of the classes you took at A&M applied directly, and obviously that helped a lot while you guys were adjusting to regulations,

but were there any other things that kind of lead to specific changes in the restaurant or have really, really helped you out that you got from getting that degree?

Bryan: I—I think from many, you know, I really appreciate the way I grew up and being from a small town and small family owned business and watching that thing grow and being a part of it. Don't get me wrong. I walked a real nice situation and all of the blood, sweat, and tears they've put into it over the years. I'm definitely benefiting from it all today. I think the biggest thing for me personally and the biggest thing I gained from Texas A&M was just getting outside of Elgin, Texas for four years and realizing dang, there's a—there's a world out there. Not only is there a world out there, but they like barbecue too and they like sausage. And so, it really helped—helped me understand—learn how, how this business can grow outside the border of Elgin, Texas.

CK: This is more of manufacturing question, but—uh—where do you guys get your machines from? The, you know, heavy machinery.

Bryan: Most of the sausage making equipment is European—uh—I guess sausage derived from Europe and Germany and big sausage making places like that. So—uh—there's, you know, American distributors of European equipment. There's some American Equipment. What we do on that is we try to find the best value and price we can. And it's easy to—to always want to buy equipment until your in the poor house to make your process better and easier and nicer, but—uh—that's—that's a constant struggle we have of growing our sausage producing capabilities. When do you purpose that next piece of equipment? And where does is come from? Um—you

know, one thing—one downfall of going with a European company is the service and the technical support that you can get form that. When you—when you have opened up your operations manual and it's—uh—in a different langue, it's a little frustrating.

CK: That's what I was going to ask. I was going to say, what happens when these machines break down? Like, do you, you know, let in a regular mechanic in or are there specialist that do this kind of machinery or--?

Bryan: There are definitely specialists that work on each specific set of equipment. What we've been fortunate to be able to do—I'm not mechanically minded, but we—my dad has kept everything running over the years. That's been one of his main contributions, I guess. As well as just running the business, but recently we found a jack-of-all-trades type guy, who just makes it happen. And so, that's what we need in this business from the, you know, we've got 15,000 square feet of processing plant from the refrigeration to the trucks on the road to the stuffers and the grinders and the smoke houses, something's always—uh—going down or needing attention in sausage manufacturing. The good thing about the barbecue piece of the business is, you know, it's pretty old fashioned and there's not much to put on another log on the fire. So, all hell could break loose, but we could still make barbecue.

CK: And this—this is—some of these are jumping around because I have follow-ups from other things, but I guess I was going to ask you, since you said you're the one that took care of the machines for so many years. Do you have any dramatic breakdown stories from dealing with the—that component of the business?

Billy: A piece of equipment is never going to break down until you have a day that you really need it. I mean as far as—uh—holiday weekend when you really preparing for the—for a big, big weekend or a big week. That's generally when something is going to happen. And luckily—uh—with the telephone and technician on the other end of it, we've always, somehow, been able to get things running again. It might knock us back an hour or so, but we've always been able to get it going. So, ironically, if it's going to break down, it's going to break down when you need it the most.

CK: Murphy's law there at play, right? And this is jumping around a little too. When—um—when did you guys start having forks? I know said full on utensils in '92, was it? So, was that the first time y'all had forks?

Bryan: No. They actually had forks and knives available prior to '92, but—uh—'68 when y'all showed up, the only utensils were knives. And they were actually chained to the table. Um—and then I don't—when did y'all add other?

00:05:08

Billy: We used paring knives for—god, I guess it must have been in the early seventies when—uh—the business started growing, the barbecue restaurant started growing, and we went to plastic knives. And then whenever we started doing our caterings and stuff then we offered—it was probably in the early '70s—offered forks too, but—uh—must people would not take a fork.

CK: So, that's what I was going to ask, how the customers reacted when y'all started bringing forks in.

Billy: They still ate with their fingers.

CK: Do people still eat with their fingers now?

Billy: Yes.

[Inaudible]

Bryan: You know, in '92 was when we first offered plate lunches. And if you want the true experience, you, like grandpa said, come in and eat on butcher paper. And a lot of the old-timers, they wouldn't eat on a plate if you made them.

CK: Do you guys make your own sides?

Bryan: Yes we do. We make all of our—everything on our menu, we make from scratch. Uh—the potato salad, we boil potatoes. The coleslaw, we chop of cabbage. Our beans, we make them. We even pickle our own jalapeños. The only thing on the menu that we don't produce here on site is the—uh—the pickles, the Bluebell Ice-cream, and then we have a pie and brownie company that services our other desserts.

CK: Um—let's see. So, two questions. One is, where did the recipes for your sides come from?

Bryan: All the recipes are just family—family recipes. The hot sauce and the barbecue sauce—uh—I think the hot sauce, they were actually making that when y'all showed up in '68. But the barbecue sauce that was added in the '80s, that was just grandma's recipe. Then the beans and potato salad and coleslaw that all—everything comes through grandma. I can remember—uh—growing up, you know, we never served potato salad, beans, anything, but whenever there was a big catering function that—that they would—uh—do, grandma would come in and they'd boil potatoes and she make the potato salad or make the beans and whatever. So, all the recipes are just basically handed down, and if we want to change anything, we go through the powers that be. You know, get it approved.

CK: I was going to ask if you guys—uh—you know, I know always with family recipes, I never feel like I get them right, you know, when somebody hands them down. And so, was that a process or, you know, was it just—because you said, you know, when you make changes, you get them handed down from the powers that be and make sure your clear on that. So, did a take a long time to get to where you got—where you knew those really, really well and you felt like you were getting them spot on or?

Bryan: Yeah. It's always difficult and nobody ever cooks as good as grandma. When grandma comes through and tastes her recipes, you know, she can be kind of critical, so. She's always real nice about it, but usually Thanksgiving dinners or Christmas dinners is when I hear, "Y'all

putting enough salt in this or that?" Or you know, "How are y'all doing this?" And so—uh—that's the joys of the family business.

CK: And then I just had a few, kind of, labor questions, I guess. How long is your workday? Like, how long do you end up in here every day?

Bryan: You know, it—we've evolved, the business has evolved, and we've evolved as well. Uh—when I first got out of college, I was showing up with my dad here at 5:30 a.m. to open up the plant. Then we'd get out of here at about 6:00 p.m. And we worked six days a week, had Sundays off, and he and I would swap weekend—uh—one of us would come in every other Sunday and make sure everything was OK. And before I came on board it was my dad and grandfather doing that. So, luckily, the business has grown and we've got a great group of people. We try to treat them like family—uh—you know, just like we treat ourselves. And they—they really do a good job for us, and so now I'm kind of spoiled. I come in at 8:00 and leave at 5:00 and work five days a week. My dad does pretty close the same schedule. My schedule's been altered a little bit—uh—for the last eighteen months. My wife and I had twin boys December 20, 2005. So, they've kind of taken some precedent.

CK: Do you have anything to add on that one?

Billy: I mean, you know, it's—it's like he says. When we first moved out here in '92, we went from a business that was open six days a week. And you had pretty much a day off in the middle of the week. You worked every Saturday, but you were closed on Sunday to being open seven

days a week. And if you weren't here, there weren't enough people to run things. So, you know, it's gone from seven, seven to working five days a week and actually enjoying life a little bit. So, it's—uh—you know, we've been through it all. I like it better the way it is now.

00:10:24

Bryan: I grew up never having vacation with my grandparents because if grandparents were out of town, parents need to be in town. And so, you know, we took—when we took our vacation with my parents, then the grandparents would take of shop and vice versa. So, I mean, part of the just deal about having a family-owned business is that somebody's got to be on site at all times. I remember that as being, you know, a distinct detail of my childhood.

Billy: I can remember taking a vacation and not knowing until Saturday afternoon at 6:00 whether you were starting your vacation on Sunday or not because you didn't know who was going to be at work or not.

CK: And you said, you know, you try really hard to treat your employees well. How long do most of them end up working here?

Bryan: We—in our restaurant, we have a lot of part-time—uh—school kids and things of that nature. And right now we have about 84 employees on staff and our guys in our butcher shop, our meat market managers, our barbecue managers, and our processing plant, and our office staff normally people hang around for quite a while. We've got a Murry Moore, who is a truck driver for us, distributes our product. He's been with us for over 20 years. We've got a guy, Wanda Flores, in the processing room foreman, he's been at this about 15 years. Milo Valencia has been

with us over ten years. I guess we've kind of undergone a little bit of a change here in the last few years in that a lot of the guys that were my dad's generation have—um—none of them have died off, but they've all kind of retired off or something. And—uh—so we're reloading. But most of good—good people hang around for a while. One thing that I think is unique that was happening when I showed up is every time somebody would have a birthday, when we had twenty to thirty people on staff, my grandma and my mom would make birthday treats, desserts, cakes, things like that. We'd have, you know, make a big deal out of it in the employee break room every time. And now we've got too many employees to do that each time, but once a month my mom, grandma they still make desserts and we have a birthday party in the breakroom. So, you know, it's a lot of the people in Elgin—no telling how many Elginites we've had working for us over the years—it's just a small town community and—uh—I think that—that translates into the way we treat our employees or try to.

CK: I've just got one more thing and then we're off the hook I think, but I was just going to ask when did—when did you guys—you know, I noticed all the merchandise out and you're wearing your hat, but when—when did you guys start doing that? And especially like the posters and things you guys have are really, you know, the really top notch stuff, like when did you guys start doing the merchandise? And when did you guys start going to this, you know, really, I guess, I don't know how to word it, but like this kind of level of graphics and stuff.

Bryan: Well, the logo and the, I guess, the marketing in the company has evolved over time. You know, when I showed up, our main thing was, you know, we served the original **Elgin** hot sausage and we've been here since 1882. And it kind of speaks for itself. The last few years

we've made a concentrated effort to really solidify our look and have one look. Being around for 125 years, you know, logos change, times change, and so, you know, we woke up one day and had five or six different ways that we were presenting our self in the restaurant and so—to our customers. And over the last two and a half years we've made a real concentrated effort to pick the one logo that says Southside Market and really market that. We've sought outside help—uh—marketing agencies in Austin to help us—uh—solidify our brand. The goal right now is just to brand it on everybody's—in their mind and—uh—just grow the legend.

CK: That's all I have. That's it.

00:15:06

EC: I have two final questions actually. Number one, what role do you feel Southside Market plays in the community of Elgin?

Bryan: I think—uh—Southside is, you know, you never can please everybody and you can't be all things to all people. So we definitely know that there's some small town politics and that we have to play and people may not like success and things like that. But all-in-all, I think Southside Market is a positive influence on our community and we try to be. One of our missions as a company is to be a pillar—pillar of our community. You know, we help out with all sorts of functions from FFA, to booster club, high school football—uh—church organization. We donate time and merchandise, sausage, and our facilities. So I think that Southside Market is definitely a positive influence on our community and we, you know, that's who we are and what we want to be. Our ultimate goal is not to sit up here and make money, we all want to retire someday, not tomorrow, but our ultimate goal is just to do business the right way. We want to stay true to

our—uh—roots and our history, remain authentic in the way we produce our products and our recipes. Uh, we don't want to not change and this—this business hasn't grown and stayed around for 125 years by not changing. We've learned how to roll with the punches and—uh—grow. Uh—but we want to do it the right way. Uh—we don't want to grow at the expense of ourselves, our character, or our community. And so trying to find the balance in all that is sometimes, sometimes difficult. But if just—if you can go home and sleep at night then you probably ran the business the right way.

Billy: And I hope that—uh—I do know this, but you know, I do hope that everybody feels the same way about it. But when people think of Southside Market they think of Elgin. And that when you hear the word—uh—Elgin the—we hope that they think about Southside Market. And—uh—we kind of believe that by doing that, it's a win-win situation for both of our images, you know. So, you know, we try to—we try to keep a good name as far as Southside Market where people kind of reflect on both of them.

EC: OK. Then my final question is—uh—what's your best memory about growing up as part of Southside Market?

Bryan: I think that—it's not easy but—just the—for me the best memory is just the smell. You know, smells take you back and you can smell something and remember exactly where you were at a certain time and day and year when you smelled that last. But just, for me, the old place, the smoke, and the atmosphere, those were the best memories. And we just recently opened up the old place for our 125-year celebration and—uh—it hadn't been open to the public since '92. And

we cleaned it up, brought some of the old equipment back up to open it up as a museum, and just the sites and smells of that old place and—uh—the barbecue, that's—there's always been a real big pride factor for me in knowing that, you know, we throw logs on the fire. That's pretty cool. You know, or real beef, that's pretty cool. Um—there's not a lot of shortcuts, and that makes for a long day sometimes and luckily we've got good people to shorten that day for us, but just the whole experience of the, you know, being Texas and proud and pride and barbecue, it all kind of goes together for me.

Billy: You know, I can go and tell you things that have happened throughout the years, and like Bryan said—uh—somebody will say something, and you'll think about something that happened, whether it be a good memory or not so good or a great memory. But going back and working on the old place—uh—getting all the old equipment brought back a lot of—a lot of good memories and a lot of, you know, memories you thought well, you know, this is it. But—uh—going from, I guess the best memory of all is seeing where we started at and how we started to where it is now and what the future is, all of the years since 1968—uh—seeing where the future is going, I guess, is the best memory of all. And live in the past, but looking forward to the future.

00:20:39

EC: OK—uh—I guess one more last question here. Uh, you know, what's going to happen, you know, when y'all kind of retire? At some point you said you want to retire, you'd like to, not right now, but—

Billy: We've got a fourth generation coming up.

EC: Is that the twins?

Bryan: That's the twins, yeah. So, I told my wife a couple of years ago, "Man we're going to have to get on our horses and get some babies up here." So, I'm twenty years younger than my dad, and I can see how his life is changing now, and I'm thinking dang, that's—you know, I don't want to wait too long for that to start happening. Realistically, you know, idealistically, I'd like to see this business stay in our family. I think grandpa and dad would. And you know, who knows what the future holds, but—uh—as long as we're still kicking and feel like we can run this business the way it should be run, there will be a Bracewell up here. And I think it's also important to point out that, you know, the Bracewells—we've been here since 1968 and that's a relatively short period of time for 125 years being in business. So, you know, we understand—I understand that we're just a piece of that history, and—uh—we're proud to be a part of it. The company itself is bigger than anyone of us, you know, and we'll hang around as long as we can to—to make sure its here for another 125 years.

EC: Well, all right. I guess that's that. I want to take the time to thank you again for taking the time to talk to us today. Thanks.

[END, Part 2 of Interview] **00:22:30**

[END]