VINCENT FONTENOT

United States National Park Ranger, Prairie Acadian Cultural Center - Eunice, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen, Southern Foodways Alliance
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[Begin Vincent Fontenot Interview]

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Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Thursday, June 19, 2008 and I'm in Eunice, Louisiana, with Mr. Fontenot. And I'm going to let you state your full name and your birth date, if you don't mind, and if you could tell us your profession and where we are right now? I can hold this.

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Vincent Fontenot: Well I prefer holding it. Well my name is Vincent Fontenot, and I'm a United States National Park Ranger. And we're here in Eunice, Louisiana, at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. This is the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center. And I was born March 9, 1948 in Pasadena, Texas. My parents are from here; my father is from Eunice. My mother is from Ville Platte; her last name was Veillon. My dad moved to Texas right after World War II to work in the petro-chemical plants. So I was born there are raised in a Cajun family in Texas. Talk about different.

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SR: Yeah. And at what point—well, first of all, could you reiterate your mom's last name, her maiden name, and—and at what point did you move here?

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VF: Okay, my mother's last name is Veillon, V-e-i-l-l-o-n. And I moved to Louisiana when I was twenty-one years old, and I've been here ever since. I lived in New Orleans for about twelve

years and came out here to Eunice, opened up Fontenot's Main Street Lounge in Basile, Louisiana. I was approached by—in fact I was a co-founder of the Cajun French Music Association, and I was approached by the National Park Service to work with the Cajun French Music Association in a cooperative agreement to design and help facilitate this cultural center that we're in. And then the Mayor of Eunice at that time, Curtis Joubert, invited me to join the Advisory Committee for the City of Eunice, so I was on two advisory committees to the National Park. And one day they said, "You know, in the near future we're going to need a park ranger in Eunice," and I jumped and hollered, "Hey, I know the guy; he's right here." So they hired me part time and—which it worked out perfect, you know. I had a saloon; I had a Cajun band; and I worked part-time for the National Park Service. And for the first four years before we built the center, my job was to collect the artifacts that we put in here. So the majority of the artifacts in—in our cultural center either was mine, my relatives or my personal friends, so everything in here is—means something very special to me.

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SR: It's interesting to me that—that you have become his ambassador of a culture that was yours by birth but not necessarily—wasn't part of your life, really, until you were already an adult.

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VF: Oh no, no, no. You have to understand, although we were in Texas, Cajuns in a foreign land tend to gather together. They meet, so in Houston there was several clubs and meetings and so forth that the Cajuns would get together. So my parents spoke French, but they would not speak French to us, the children. They would speak to each other in code; they thought it was a

code, so we wouldn't understand. And you do that to a kid that kid is going to learn what they're saying. So I learned to speak French because my parents didn't want me to learn to speak French. **[*Laughs*]**

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And in our neighborhood we were always different. Number one were Catholic, you know, in a Protestant area; we were Cajuns, that's, you know, what kind of alien creatures are those? We spoke differently; we thought differently; and my friends didn't eat the foods that we ate. We ate gumbo and we ate boudin, you know, jambalaya. These—my friends had never heard of these and they loved it. They loved it. **[*Laughs*]**

00:04:11

SR: Well I'll jump right into boudin, since I have a million questions I could ask you, but in case we run out of time, so when you were growing up in Texas you said that you ate boudin. Was that boudin that was transported from here that someone sold there or that someone made at home?

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VF: The—I remember the very first time I ate boudin, and we had a boucherie at a family—their name was Guidry, and it was cold. It was—it was in December and it was one of the rare times that it snowed in the Houston area, and there might have been an inch of snow on the ground. And they brought this huge hog in there, you know, and killed the hog and started—they had a big table out there, and I was like five years old. My job was to clean the intestines. Talk about a crappy job. **[*Laughs*]** It was pretty bad.

00:05:01

So we cleaned—that was—mostly children would do that at a boucherie—clean the intestines—because it was—it was a filthy job, but it was simple. And then they began grinding up the meat and, at that time, boudin was really made from the trash of the hog that you didn't eat, like the sides of the head, any—anything, you know, the ankles, the feet. They would shred that meat off. And, as you're probably aware today, it's not trash meat, you know. This is made from—from pork bellies. This is the meat just above the ribs, so this—this is a choice cut of meat now that goes into boudin. But back then it wasn't, it was just trash. And they'd grind it up and I'd saw them, you know, with the bell peppers and—and, excuse me, the—the green top onions, the white onions, parsley, the—salt, black pepper, red pepper, mixed all of this in and they—they had a machine for stuffing. It was a sausage that you would turn with—with your hand, turn by hand, and as they did it, they told me that years ago when they were young people, this is the people that was at the boucherie, would use a cow horn, and they'd put the intestine on the end of the—of course they cut the end—the pointed end of the cow horn and they'd slide the intestine and the casing over it and then start pushing meat—packing meat into the horn and—and push it out. And at that time they said, "Oh, look how easy it is," you know, "to turn rather than—than pack." And today the method that they use, you know, with water pressure and the bladder and, you know, that sausage just shoots out of there, you know, a mile a minute.

[*Laughs*]

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But when we made it, it was—it was very slow and it was—it was not an easy job.

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SR: Can you tell me a bit about the process of cleaning those intestines?

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VF: **[*Laughs*]** All I can tell you—it was nasty and it stunk, and we had some—let's see if I'm—I'm trying to remember it was so long ago. I—I think it was ammonia, I'm not sure. It was something to sanitize it, but we had a big tub of water and we had them in there, you know, cleaning it, and they would put something in the water, but I don't remember exactly. And we would stretch it out. Well first you squeezed the stuff out, okay, and then you would—you'd turn the—the casing inside out and then you would clean that part that was left.

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SR: Did you—after having done that, did you want to eat what went in there?

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VF: I was kind of hesitant, you know, because I'd see—uh-oh. I saw where it came out of there, but I also saw what went in there. **[*Phone Rings*]** So it—it—I ate it, and it was good, and I still love—I love boudin.

00:07:52

SR: The—the Guidry's boucherie, was that in Texas?

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VF: Yeah, it was in a little town called Highlands, Texas, just outside of—of Houston on the way to—to Baytown.

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SR: Did they make blood boudin?

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VF: No, not at that time. I've eaten blood boudin, and from what I understand there's only one commercial outlet that still makes it, and that's the Best Stop in Scott, Louisiana; and I was talking to the owner about it and also Bubba Frey, who is going to be here. He's our local celebrity in making boudin, and they both told me the same thing. The reason the commercial outlets don't make red boudin or boudin rouge with blood is because, if you do make it, you must have an FDA inspector onsite right there with you. You must supply him with his own office, his own parking spot, and his own bathroom. So it's—it's very, very expensive if you want to make red boudin. And the reason the FDA inspector is there, from what they told me, is you cannot allow the blood to coagulate. You know, it's—you have to be very, very careful when you're dealing with blood.

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SR: So after—after—so the boucherie, the Guidry's boucherie—just tell me if we need to pause—was your first taste of boudin. I guess two questions: Did you take to it right away, and then how much was boudin a part of your upbringing after that?

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VF: Well I enjoyed the first one and then afterwards you didn't—you couldn't buy it, you know, in Texas, and that was the only time I ever ate it in Texas, other than bringing it back. But we would come here so often to Louisiana from Texas, and I'm talking like at least twice a

month we would come here to visit and stay with our relatives. So I would eat it here, but not in Texas because you couldn't buy it. You could get it here but not there.

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SR: And in what context would you get it here? At—at a shop or would somebody have made it at home?

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VF: Well sometimes it—it—they would make it at home, but the majority of the time, you know, they'd go to the—the—the sausage kitchens that we have in this area.

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SR: What about if somebody comes in here and asks you about the origins of boudin, what—what is your understanding about that and what would you tell them?

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VF: [*Laughs*] Am I glad you asked that question. We do a lot of boudin food demonstrations on Saturday, and over the years I've learned it's not just boudin sausage. We've discovered boudin balls, there's also a boudin dip I just discovered this week with—with the boudin meat and Velveeta cheese. I haven't tried it yet. And what else is in that Charlene that—that dip that Miss Bercie was telling us about? Oh, I've forgotten—cream of celery, I believe. Cream of mushroom? She's going to bring us the recipe. And then you get a Frito corn chip dip, and she said it is delicious. Yeah; the other one that we had is—that I've discovered is a boudin in a—in a puff pastry and you—you lay the meat out in a pan, and you cover it up with the pastry rolls,

you know, that you buy in the grocery store that you—you know how you unroll them and lay them out and you cover it—cover the boudin with this pastry topping. You put it in the oven; you bake it—I'll have to look because I don't know the exact time until it's brown, and then you take it out and you take Steen's Cane Syrup and drip it on top of that, and then you take Creole mustard and spread on top of that and it's—. So it's not just boudin, you know, there's other—other recipes and other uses, but we've got—we've just got a brand new book in called *Stir the Pot* [*Stir the Pot: The History of Cajun Cuisine* by Marcelle Bienvenu], and we learned a lot from them.

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And, for one thing, the—the world—people would ask us, "Where does the word *boudin*— where does that come from?" Everybody will go, "I don't know. We just, you know, my daddy called it boudin and his daddy and his daddy." Well we found out the—it comes from an archaic French word called bedaine—b-e-d-a-i-n-e—meaning the guts or the entrails. And then we also thought that boudin was, you know, relatively new, say 200 or 300 years old, maybe. You know, we weren't sure. Well the first appearance in documentary records is in 1268 A.D. So this—this practice has been going on for, let's see, what is that—almost 800 years they've been making boudin. But it also—it—and it's not just from the French. The—the French colonialism, you know, when they started colonizing, they spread this method to Belgium, Switzerland, Quebec, the Antilles, French North Africa, and, of course, here in Louisiana. So it—we're not the only ones that make boudin.

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But the—the—the method that they used, again, it was trash meat and—and it was—the sausage casing was, you know, a very simple method—a vessel that you could keep—keep the product in. And the purpose of red boudin, you know, why did you put blood in there? Well the

salt was controlled by the—let's see, where am I at right here? I'm looking at this. Let's see—anyway, salt was controlled by the royalty, and it was very expensive, so instead of having to buy salt, you put blood as a substitute for salt. And I didn't know that until this book came out. And also until the 1920s when rice became a cash crop, that's when they started putting rice in boudin—in the '20s. Before that they used corn and meat to make boudin. I didn't know that either. This is a very eye-opening book that we've recently got. And so that's what I start telling people about boudin.

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SR: Thank you. Do you have any idea from that book or otherwise when boudin might have started being made here? Do you think it was right away when the Cajuns came from—from Nova Scotia or the Germans, do you know?

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VF: Well the—getting back, the Germans had a big influence on sausage making, but boudin, its origins are France. So it must have gone from France to Acadia, which is now Nova Scotia, and Nova Scotia to Louisiana. I'm sure the—the process, you know, the—the whole thing followed with the Acadians when they arrived here, so I'm sure they've been making boudin here since the—when the first Acadians arrived around 1765 here in America.

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SR: I wonder if there was any kind of sausage making in the Native American culture here, do you know?

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VF: No, that—that I can't answer you because the—the Germans are the biggest influence on sausage making, and if you notice around here we eat a lot of smoked sausage, and you get below I-10 [Interstate-10] into the wetlands or what we call the Bayou Cajun culture, you won't find smoked sausage. We have a ranger here that's from Houma down in South Louisiana. She wasn't raised with smoked sausage, so when—when we'd make gumbo for her, you know, chicken and sausage gumbo, it was just alien. She just—"Oh," you know, "I don't like that. It's got that smoked taste in the chicken." Well that's purpose. That's the point of putting sausage in the gumbo, to get that smoked flavor. But it's the Germans that introduced sausage making here.

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SR: I wonder if her people put any kind of sausage in their gumbos or none at all.

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VF: No. No, see, because down there the—it was seafood, you know, and here we didn't have seafood that many years ago until refrigeration and so forth came about, so her gumbos were mainly seafood gumbos, and if they used anything other it was just chicken.

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SR: Fascinating. Tell me a little bit about the—the Saturday demos that you do, if you could.

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VF: Yeah, well every—every Saturday here, every Saturday afternoon, first of all, at three o'clock we have a live music program, and it's an interpretive music program where we have

volunteer musicians and volunteer dancers. We talk about the songs, the instruments, the—the waltz, the two-step. And then at four o'clock we have our foodways demonstration. What we found is it's faster and cheaper to cook it ahead of time than it is to actually cook it while the people are here. It just takes too long, and people get bored looking at a pot of gumbo boiling and steaming until it's—it's ready. And so the majority of the—the demonstrations are either by Bubba Frey or by me. And we do different things with—of course with boudin but other things. We do a lot of rice cooker recipes where you just throw everything in the rice pot, rice maker, and—rice cooker and just turn it on and—and let it cook.

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And, again, and that's a perfect example of one-pot cooking that the Cajuns are known for, unlike Creole cooking, where, you know, you have a lot of sausage. You might have several courses in a meal, and we just throw everything in a pot and cook it real slow for a long time. And if it flies, swims, or crawls, we can make it taste good. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: [*Laughs*] Let me—can you talk a little bit about what you think boudin means to the people in this area to the culture?

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VF: Well, boudin here is a very, very important part because we eat it for breakfast. We eat it for lunch. We eat it for supper. It doesn't matter, you can eat it any time of the day. And if you notice, we eat a lot of pork in this area, and, from what I've read, the reason is that many years ago your wealth was based on how many head of cattle you had. So you didn't want to eat your wealth, so you had hogs; and they grew very quickly, and you could smoke the meat and

preserve it and eat it year-round. You'd smoke it and put it in these crocks with lard, and if you wanted sausage in the middle of the winter, you just opened that crock and pulled a piece of sausage out and eat it.

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Another problem with eating beef is that there was no refrigeration, so if—if you killed a cow, you better eat it because you don't have much time. It's going—the meat is going to spoil, and that was another reason for having boucheries: to help, you know, to slaughter not only pigs but cows, and then you would divide the meat. Somebody would bring a calf or a cow one Saturday—one weekend—and everybody would get a piece, and then you could go home and you could eat it before it spoiled. Then the next boucherie would be at somebody else's house, and they would bring the cow or calf and so forth and so on. So it—it really helped to—to not only distribute the food, but it was a social gathering also. And—and you got to eat beef whenever, but the pork meat was so important because you could smoke it and keep it and eat it year-round. Beef you couldn't.

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SR: That's very interesting. I haven't—I haven't had anybody give me that explanation before, the difference between eating pork and beef. That makes a lot of sense. So it sounds like—I'm skipping around a little bit here, but while you were talking it made me think that, you know, you had this boucherie experience with the Guidry family in Texas. It sounds like parents really kept their Cajun culture even in Texas. Did they ever move back to this area?

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VF: No. No, they didn't, until my mother was—could no longer live alone and we brought here her to Eunice to put her in a nursing care facility, but that was the only time she moved back here. But they did—they were very much into their culture and very, very proud. My dad was so proud to be a Cajun, and so many of cousins around here were kind of ashamed, you know, because people at that time just kind of belittled Cajuns, as if, you know, they were backward, they were stupid, they were slow. But my dad was extremely proud, and he was proud of the fact that he could speak two languages and these Texans couldn't. And they would go every Saturday night—I'm talking practically every Saturday night there was a Cajun dance that we'd go to. And, of course, when I was a kid, there was no such thing as a babysitter. You'd bring the kids wherever you're going, and they'd bring us to the dance. And the old ladies—we called them old ladies, they were probably in their thirties, you know, and we were, you know, eight, nine, ten years old, and they'd come grab us and they'd make us go on the dance floor and, oh, it was so embarrassing, but by-golly I learned to dance, **[*Laughs*]** and I've been dancing all my life because of these—these Saturday night events in Texas.

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SR: Hmm. What about now? Do you have any of your Texas culture as a part of your life?

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VF: Perhaps the boots and cowboy hat, you know. That's—that's about the only thing that's left. And got rid of that Texas braggadocios way. You know the Cajuns kind of resent that because Texans come here, everything is bigger and everything is better in Texas, and the Cajuns just go, "Oh, yeah, okay. Yeah, but you don't live here, and you don't eat like we do." **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: You know, I've found a real pride in general in the culture of the people I talk to around here. Do you think that that's changed? You know, you were saying before that people when you were growing up were sort of ashamed because Cajuns were, you know, thought of as being unintelligent or all the other things you said. Do you think that that's changed in general?

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VF: Oh, absolutely. There—there was a renaissance and—and I attribute it to Dewey Balfa, a great Cajun musician, who in I think it was in 1964 went to the Newport Folklife Festival and he and three—there was two other Cajun musicians that went up there, and it's a huge, huge festival. It's still going on. And in the local paper, to give you an idea, in the *Opelousas Daily World*—and we have a copy of this—they talked about these Cajun musicians going up and going to make a fool of themselves with their, you know, their squeaky music, you know, and their backward ways and people are going to laugh at them. Well these Cajun musicians got up there, you know, and here was Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. They came out and did their—their—their music onstage, and like Dewey Balfa said the most people he had ever played for was maybe 200 or 300; there was probably 10,000 people. He had never seen or played before a crowd that big. They got a standing ovation. They had to come back and play two or three times. They fell in love with this music, and Dewey Balfa says, "Whoa, wait a minute. We're not," you know, "we're not stupid. We're not—these people love our music." So he came back, and he dedicated his life and—and I think he's the one that really started this renaissance to—to appreciate our culture.

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And one thing he told me one day was, you know, your—your culture is like an old rock in the backyard, you know, and every day you walk by, and you just kick that old rock. Yeah. Yeah, there's an old rock, and one day somebody walks up and says, "Hey," you know, "that's twenty-four-carat gold you've got in your backyard." He went, "Huh, you're right, it sure is." And he just started this whole pride in—in being a—being different. You know, the rest of the world wants to make it McDonald's from sea to shining sea, and this Americanization of Cajuns that's taken place because of the influence of the media—TV and radio and railroad and highways of course—changed it. But the Americans—the Americans—the Cajuns are very tenacious people. They—they changed with the Americanization, but still they retain their pride in their culture and hopefully their language.

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SR: Can you spell Dewey's last name for me?

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VF: Okay, Dewey Balfa—B-a-l-f-a and he was—his group was called the Balfa Brothers—very, very famous Cajun band.

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SR: That's another fascinating tidbit nobody has told me. So I guess that kind of leads into another question I had, which is a little bit abstract, but in your—you know, your time here and, you know, observing, have you seen Cajun cultures in general and boudin cultures specifically change at all, possibly due to outside influences or tourism or—or sort of, I don't know, outside world demands or perceptions?

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VF: Well the—the influence from the outside is—is ever-changing, just like Cajun cuisine in general, you know. Cajun food doesn't taste like food up in Nova Scotia where, you know, they're still Acadians. Up there it's very bland, so there was a big outside influence from all of these cultures from—from the Native Americans, from the Afro-Americans, who—the Spanish, all of these people contributed to the development of what we call Cajun cuisine today. But still, it's an ongoing thing. Okay, for example, the—we—we have crawfish pizza, we have crawfish egg rolls, so it—it continues this outside influence and—and again the Americanization. It's Cajun cuisine. It's—well, I should say, it's American cuisine but with a Cajun flavor.

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SR: So it sounds like you're pretty optimistic about the—I don't know, the stamina of the culture here.

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VF: Well, I am. I'm very optimistic about it because of the music. And as Marc Savoy says, the—the music is the glue that holds our culture together. Without the music there's no glue, and it will fall apart. The—the glue—the music being the glue in that first of all, it's sung in French, so you've got the language. And when—when you play music, you're going to eat, and you're going to cook, whether it's at home or you go to some of the restaurants, the Cajun restaurants that have live Cajun music, so there's that glue everywhere(s) you go. And as long as we keep the music, keep the glue, it—it will survive.

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SR: So I like that, but, you know, it's not true of all kinds of music that food would—would automatically follow. Why—why do you think that's true in Cajun culture?

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VF: It's—I think it's family—very, very family oriented. And I—I think the rest of the nation has—has lost that. The respect for elderly here is so different. You go to New York City, you know, and you get old, stick them in a nursing home and forget about them. Not here. It's not that way and they—they hate to put their senior citizens—**[*Laughs*]** because I'm getting there. I love to call myself that. They do everything they can not to put them in nursing homes. They have them move in with the family. They build a little house next to, you know, to have Mama or Papa live close and finally, the—the most drastic thing is when they can no longer take care of them, and they have to have 24-hour care, and therefore they have to put them in some sort of nursing facility.

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That—that's what I think. Yeah, that's different. And—and, again, the other cultures just seem to have lost that. The music—okay, fine, you know, we have this music, but that's all they've got and they've—they've forgotten where they came from. And if you don't know where you came from, you don't know where you're going.

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SR: That's true. In—in terms of boudin, did you notice anything change with the oil boom? And I guess I'm asking this because I associate boudin culture with sort of gas station culture that

became more important as people, I think—this is just a theory—like drove—were driving to work, rather than working on the farm. Does that resonate at all, or does that not seem right?

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VF: You know what? I don't—I don't—I really don't think the oil boom had anything to do with it. Whether there was an oil boom or an oil bust, it's still the same and, again, boudin is just a very, very popular thing in this area. Again, I'm repeating myself, you go south of I-10 you won't find much boudin, but here within say a forty-, fifty-miles radius, boudin is a very big part of our life.

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SR: Oh, somebody is chiming in. People eat boudin at weddings?

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VF: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

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SR: In what form—in a link?

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VF: Any finger foods, they cut it—they cut it into bite-sized pieces. And I don't think I've ever been to a Cajun wedding over here that there is not some sort of boudin that's there, you know, with the rest of the dishes. **[*Laughs*]**

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SR: That's great. Where do you get boudin if you go out and get some?

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VF: Well of course **[*Laughs*]** Bubba Frey in Mowata, Louisiana. That's a little community about eight miles south and—of—of Eunice and in Mowata there's a church, there's a grocery store and a restaurant, and that's it. And the only thing Bubba Frey doesn't own is the church and—and the cemetery. And he's—he is renowned for his boudin. On an average weekday he will sell 400 to 500 pounds—on a weekday and on a Saturday he will sell anywhere from 1,000 to 1,400 pounds of boudin.

00:32:17

SR: I've had his boudin. I like it. **[*Laughs*]**

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VF: It is very good.

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SR: What can—so when I first arrived here, you were with some children. Can you tell me what you were making and why they were here?

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VF: Okay, what—what we have here is a—a cultural camp, summer cultural camp that we do every year in June and July. It lasts one week from Monday through Friday from 8:30 until noon,

and it's a cultural camp but not just Cajun culture. It's all of the—the ethnic groups in our area that contributed to what is going on on the prairie, from the Germans, the Native Americans, and so forth. And what we were doing this morning, the kids were making their own candy and it's—it's a candy called *boule rouge,* which means red ball, and it's made with coconut and Karo® syrup and granulated sugar and powdered sugar that you roll into a ball. You roll the coconut with the Karo® syrup into a ball, and then you have your sugar on the side—granulated and powdered sugar with red dye because they—they would—the tradition was around Christmas time and they would use red—sometimes green but mostly red because it was called *boule rouge* and you would roll this coconut ball into that dyed sugar. And when—when I was a kid, you would buy them in the grocery store. They'd be on—on the counter in just an open quart jar and you'd reach in and get your own *boule rouge* with your bare hands. And when I was real little, they were a penny apiece, and then, as I got older, they were a nickel. And now they—they've disappeared and I—you can still find them but not—not very often. And I guess because of health and safety reasons—but one of the great things I didn't tell you about is to take that *boule rouge* and dip it in chocolate. And what have you got? Peter Paul Mounds. **[*Laughs*]**

00:34:30

SR: Good point. So you said something that's—that's interesting is that you don't only study Cajun culture—or don't only introduce the children to Cajun culture but of the other cultural influences in this area. So I think that there's a perception that Cajun is the culture of this area. Can you—can you, for the record, tell what Cajun culture is and where it came from?

00:34:59

VF: Okay, well it—it is the dominant culture in this area, and where it came from, which is an area off of Canada, which is now called Nova Scotia. At that time, when the Acadians were there it was called Acadia—and the Acadians are this group of people who left France and the first colony was—well they first started moving in 1604, but the first colony was established in 1605. And this was a group of people that left France because of religious persecution and it was—they were serfs. You never—you never owned land, but here you could come to the New World and own land. So they—they arrived here and established themselves as—established the colony and it flourished for 150 years. After 150 years, England was at war with French Canada, which was Quebec and so forth—the interior—and here were these Acadians sitting on Nova Scotia off the coast in a very strategic location, plus they outnumbered the British soldiers. So the British wanted them to swear allegiance to the King of England and become subjects to the King of England and become members of the Church of England. And the Acadians kept refusing. They kept saying, "Look, we're—we're neutral," you know, "we've been 150 years. We are our own self-governing people, and we're not going to fight for France, and we're not going to fight for you. We're just going to stay here." Well they were—they were adamant they would not—they would not swear allegiance.

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So the English, you know, in a very, very sneaky manner in cooperation with the Governor of Massachusetts brought forces in—the militia in and told them that—well, the first thing they did was take their weapons away, and if you notice in any government overthrow, as in Germany in Hitler's era, take the guns away. They took the guns away, and they said, "Okay, now everybody—all the men seventeen years or older meet at the church, and we're going to return your weapons. Well they met in the churches, and they locked them up, locked the doors. They told the women, "Go home. Whatever you can carry on your back, you're out of here."

00:37:25

So they—the women went home, rushed home, got whatever they could carry. The British had ships sail in, loaded them, didn't care if the—the husband went on one ship, the father—the mother went on one, a child went—they didn't care. Just throw them on the ship and get them out of here. So they—they expelled them, and they placed them in the British Colonies. Some went back to England as prisoners of war because they, you know—some of them fought. Some went to France; some went to Haiti, Santo Domingo. Some went as far as the Falkland Islands.

00:38:05

Then they—through learning—through word of mouth they found out that there was a French colony here in Louisiana, so slowly they started making their way over here. The first group were—arrived here after 1755 when they were expelled. The first group arrived here in 1765. The last large group to arrive was 1785, so this was a thirty-year exile.

00:38:33

Some of the Acadians that arrived here were not even born in Acadia. They were either in France or England or somewhere(s) else, and they arrived here thinking it was a French colony. Well guess what? It was a Spanish colony, but the Spanish loved them. They said, "Hey, here's a great group of people. They hate the British, you know. They're Catholic like us. We'll just give them some land. We'll establish—we'll set up this barrier against the British intrusion." So some—the first group went down to south Louisiana in what is now Lafource Parish, Terrebonne [Parish]. And then the other groups headed out this way to the Opelousas Territory and established themselves here on the prairie. And that's basically how the—the Acadians came to Louisiana.

00:39:27

SR: Thank you. I just have a couple more questions before I let you go. One is if somebody you know walks in here, like I asked you about boudin and asked you about the origins of gumbo, what would you say?

00:39:44

VF: Ah, gumbo, by the way, is an African word for okra, and that was introduced to the Acadians through the Afro-American natives, you know, that—that brought that here. And gumbo, everybody has got their own recipe to make gumbo, and everybody says theirs is the best. And but Cajun gumbo is different than the Creole gumbo. You know, you go to New Orleans, it's going to taste different. They put tomatoes in their gumbo, and no Cajun in his right mind would ever, ever put tomatoes in his gumbo. And, again, that's a very well-known dish, and it's very simple. It really is. To make gumbo you—first of all you start with a roux. **[*Laughs*]** And then you go from there and you can have, you know, meat gumbo; you can have seafood gumbo; or you can have what's called gumbo z'herbes. And they make gumbo in—during Lent, when you couldn't eat meat and it was just—it was vegetables. And then there's okra gumbo, and okra gumbo, instead of using roux as the base, they used okra as the base to make their gumbo with. When people come in here and they talk about gumbo, well, yeah, you've got to have gumbo. You've got to try boudin. That's the first two things you need to eat around here. Oh, and then crawfish. Got to—got to eat crawfish before you leave.

00:41:11

SR: Is there somewhere in the area where you would recommend eating gumbo?

00:41:13

VF: Well, let me tell you, if you—the—the Cajun restaurants in our area, you have to understand that the people here are gourmets. They're gourmet cooks, and you open a restaurant here and if—if you are not good, you know, you're food is not authentic or whatever, six months, you're gone. So any restaurant in this area—and the majority of them have been opened for several years—some brand new but they—they worked at another restaurant that retired and moved to this one, and immediately, you know, they had a following. But any restaurant here in the area that—that serves gumbo we recommend because they know what they're doing. They've been around.

00:42:00

SR: What about gumbo in your house growing up? What kind of gumbo would your parents make?

00:42:07

VF: Well we didn't eat seafood—very, very little seafood in Texas. Our gumbos were always chicken and sausage—always. That was—the only time I ate any gumbo different than that was when I would come back to visit my relatives here, you know, in Southwest Louisiana.

00:42:25

SR: And what—how—what color was the roux?

00:42:29

VF: [*Laughs*] The roux, while you're making it, is brown, you know. It's flour and oil, and you keep stirring it, and you have to know the right color; and it's got to be just a certain shade of brown, and if it's too dark, hmm, throw it out, you know, because it's burnt **[*Laughs*]** and it's going to taste nasty.

00:42:48

SR: Do you carry on any of the cooking traditions of your family?

00:42:51

VF: [*Laughs*] My grandchildren just came in from Houston. They live over there and—and I cooked them a crawfish étouffée Monday night, and it was to die for. It was so good, the next night I offered to take them out to a restaurant, you know, where there's music and other Cajun food, and they said, "Nah," they'd rather stay home and eat Paw Paw's crawfish étouffée. Oh, well that made me feel proud.

00:43:16

SR: There is no better compliment than that. **[*Laughs*]** Oh, here come the children. We'll wrap this up, but if you could just answer one final question: What is it that you like about your job the most?

00:43:26

VF: The people—the people that we meet here. They come from all over the world, and they want to know, you know, what is this Cajun thing and especially around Mardis Gras. What is Mardis Gras, you know, and that's my favorite time. That's what I love the most and interacting

with people and interpreting the culture and telling them, you know, where to have fun, where to eat, where to dance and enjoy themselves, you know, and spread the gospel, you know. As I—I always tell them, keep Louisiana green. Bring those Yankee dollars down here.

00:43:59

SR: Well, thank you. I appreciate you giving me so much time and—and this is a great conversation.

00:44:05

VF: You're quite welcome—quite welcome.

00:44:09

[End Vincent Fontenot Interview]