



**Anthony and Megan Arceneaux**  
**Hawk's Crawfish and Hawk's Boil Up - Rayne, Louisiana**  
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Date: February 1, 2020  
Location: Hawk's Crawfish - Rayne, Louisiana  
Interviewer: Rien Fertel  
Transcription: Technitype Transcripts  
Length: 1 hour, 9 minutes  
Project: Sustainable South Louisiana

**Rien Fertel:** All right. This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, just after 11:00 a.m., and I am at Hawk’s restaurant in Robert’s Cove, Louisiana [Interviewer’s Note: Hawk’s is actually located in Rayne, Louisiana], and I’m going to have the Arceneaux family introduce themselves, please.

[0:00:20.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I’m Anthony Arceneaux. I own Hawk’s restaurant. I am fifty-seven years old. I was born in August of [19]62. And my daughter is here also.

[0:00:35.4]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Hi. I’m Megan Arceneaux. I am the owner and operator of Hawk’s Boil Up. It is the kind of mobile part of Hawk’s. I was born July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1982. I am thirty-seven years old.

[0:00:53.1]

**Rien Fertel:** All right. Thank y’all. Let’s start with where we are. Mr. Arceneaux, let’s start with you. Can you tell us where we are in Louisiana, in Acadiana? Can you describe this town, this community, and where you grew up, if you grew up here?

[0:01:08.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I was born and raised right here. We’re in the southern part of Louisiana. We’re about twenty miles west of Lafayette, a big farming community, a lot

of rice, they raise a lot of rice around here, and that's kind of how the crawfish industry started many years ago. But that's where it all takes place, right here.

[0:01:36.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Were your family farmers? Did you grow up farming?

[0:01:39.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** My family was farmers. I was like fourth-generation farmer. It evolved over time to that point. I don't farm anymore, but, yes, I'm fourth generation.

[0:01:58.2]

**Rien Fertel:** And what were they farming back in the day?

[0:02:00.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Rice.

[0:02:00.4]

**Rien Fertel:** It was rice.

[0:02:01.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Yes, rice, cattle, and then soybeans came into the picture. And basically, farming was—it started getting bad in the late [19]70s, really bad. The rice industry took a turn for the worst price-wise, can't get a decent price for the crops, so

they had to look for something else to do, make ends meet. That's how crawfish came into the picture.

[0:02:30.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. And so before the restaurant opened, what were you doing, after school? What did your life look like?

[0:02:39.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Farming. Farming.

[0:02:40.0]

**Rien Fertel:** It was farming.

[0:02:40.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Yes, sir. I've been doing this since I was a little bitty boy.

[0:02:43.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[0:02:44.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** My dad farmed, so when we got out of school, we were working like everybody else. We had chores to do and there was a lot of tractor work. Whenever you farm agriculture, it's seven days a week. It's not 8:00 to 5:00. It's sometimes till midnight at night. That's what we did.

[0:03:06.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** He got emancipated when he was sixteen.

[0:03:09.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Fifteen.

[0:03:10.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, it was fifteen. Sorry.

[0:03:12.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I was emancipated when I was fifteen years old and started farming on my own at fifteen years old.

[0:03:17.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Did you move away from the home or did you stay at home?

[0:03:21.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** At that time, no, I was still in the home—

[0:03:22.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[0:03:23.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** —with my parents. I just was only fifteen years old.

[0:03:25.9]

**Rien Fertel:** But you stopped going to school. I’m guessing that’s what you mean.

[0:03:29.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** No, I kept going to school.

[0:03:30.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, you kept going to school. Okay.

[0:03:31.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Went to school a half a day. The reason I was emancipated is so that I could borrow money from Farmers Home Administration back in 1978, I think it was.

[0:03:43.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[0:03:44.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** And the reason I was emancipated, so that my parents wouldn’t be liable for my debts, and that’s the only way that they would loan the money to me, is if I was on my own, and I had to go about it. At fifteen years old, I borrowed a *whole* lot of money to jump in the crawfish business.

[0:04:05.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, it was the crawfish business. Okay. Before we get there, I want to ask you about your father and to get his name and his nickname and where he got that nickname.

[0:04:11.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** All right. My dad, his real name is Luther—

[0:04:14.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Henry.

[0:04:17.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** —Henry Arceneaux, and he was nicknamed “Hawk” way back. He told us at one time he thinks it was in the second grade, when he was in elementary school. All the little boys would call each other names, and his stuck with him throughout

life. So he was always known around here as Hawk. Bigger than life. He always had a smile on his face and always willing to help somebody who needed help.

[0:04:44.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Did he or did you grow up speaking French in this community, or was it strictly English?

[0:04:50.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** His father, my grandfather, when he married my grandmother, could only speak French, and my grandmother couldn't speak no French at all, but they got married and they somehow communicated, and they learned how to speak each other's language. And they had four kids, so I guess it all worked out. [Laughs.]

[0:05:13.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And what were their names? Do you know their names?

[0:05:16.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Claude Arceneaux and Edna Arceneaux.

[0:05:18.8]

**Rien Fertel:** What was your mother's name? I like names on the record.

[0:05:21.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Denise. My mother comes from a French family, too, out around Church Point. She's a Comeaux.

[0:05:29.7]

**Rien Fertel:** So when did your father open this restaurant?

[0:05:34.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** In 1982. Basically, going back on the story I was telling you, in 1978, I borrowed some money to start farming.

[0:05:46.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Farming crawfish?

[0:05:48.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Rice and crawfish. My dad also had crawfish. Now, what you have to understand is back then in the [19]70s, there was hardly any markets for that. Not that many people ate crawfish, just local people. So the first couple of years, between the two of us, we had probably about 700 acres of crawfish. We couldn't even get rid of all of them. I sold crawfish by the truckloads, I can remember, for fifteen cents a pound. [Fertel laughs.] And then struck a deal with the processor to get seventeen cents a pound, but I had to drive them to Eunice, which is about twenty miles from here, in the afternoon, myself. So instead of him coming to pick them up, if I brought them to him, he'd give me two extra pennies a pound, come out to seventeen cents a pound.

So after about three or four years of this, my dad—which we already had the building, he had a building over here—he decided, he said, “Let’s try to open up some type of little cafe or something so we can move our own crawfish,” he said, “at least some of the better ones.” Because we was getting pennies for them, we couldn’t hardly get rid of them.

So about that time when we started kind of renovating the little building that we had over here, somebody had told him that Texas A&M University had devised a system that would clean crawfish. And you have to understand my dad. My dad—when we were little kids, we always had crawfish ponds. We weren’t selling much crawfish, but we always had a pond or two, not a bunch, but for family use.

[0:07:55.5]

**Rien Fertel:** You’d boil in your backyard?

[0:07:55.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right, correct. In fact, my first crawfish sale, myself, was when I was in the second grade. I caught my schoolteacher two sacks of crawfish, and I sold them for \$8, and that \$8 lasted me just about all summer. [Megan Arceneaux and Fertel laugh.] I was the richest kid in the neighborhood. But that proved to me then that you could make a few dollars with this, you know. So all through high school, when I was going to high school, every now and then somebody would want a sack of crawfish, I’d catch them. And that’s how I kind of learned the business side of it.

But when we'd get off the bus, when we'd get home from school, my dad would be boiling crawfish sometime that he went and caught that day for us to eat in the backyard, like you say, backyard boil. And he would wash the crawfish and he'd clean. He was real particular about cleaning crawfish.

[0:08:50.4]

**Rien Fertel:** How would he wash them? How would he clean them?

[0:08:52.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** In a big tub, just fresh running water, just—

[0:08:55.9]

**Rien Fertel:** With a hose or something?

[0:08:57.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right. Rinse and rinse and rinse and rinse. And we were hungry. We'd have got off the bus, we was starving to death, and it'd take him so long because he made sure that there was no little grass or dirt or anything in the crawfish. He was real particular.

So when we got in the crawfish business and we was getting into the—I want to say a cafe business, because that's about all it was back then, just a small building. In fact, we only had nine tables. So he said somebody told him that Texas A&M University had devised a plan to clean crawfish, a system. So we called one day and we spoke to the

professor that was kind of in charge of that division, and he told us, he said, “Y’all come Saturday,” he said, “and I’ll show you. I’ll give you a tour of what we doing.”

So we went, went out to Texas A&M, and when we got there, their system that they clean crawfish was very small. It was only like maybe four foot wide by eight feet long. And we seen everything they were doing to it. You have to pump a lot of oxygen in the water with pumps, circulate water but also fresh water in, coming in all at the same time, a combination of different things. It keeps the crawfish alive, and what it does, basically, is you’re starving them, you’re not giving them anything to eat until they digest everything. It takes a crawfish a certain amount of time to digest. It’s just like humans. When you hear people saying, “Well, I clean mine. I purge mine right before I cook them. I put salt in there.” Crawfish is a freshwater crustacean. If you put salt in the water, you’re killing them right before you’re cooking them. He’s going to spit up what he has in his mouth, and that’s not the part that you’re eating. You’re eating the part that’s on the south end, way in the back.

[0:11:03.3]

**Rien Fertel:** The tail, right.

[0:11:04.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right. And it has to go through a process, a digestive process, to get clean. So you’re not just cleaning—you’re cleaning everything. You’re cleaning the gills out. People suck heads. That’s full of mud. The vein in the tail is the last part. What

we do is we start from the tip and when it's finished going out the back end, that's when we ready to cook them. Sometime it takes twenty-four hours, when the crawfish are young, tender. But in the latter part of the season, the last half of the season, forty-eight hours it takes to do a complete purge.

[0:11:45.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Because they're dirtier, they need more. Okay.

[0:11:47.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right. Now, you're going to hear different theories and different stories, that people can purge crawfish in six hours. They can't purge crawfish in six hours. You might could wash them in six hours, but it takes that crawfish time to totally digest everything that he's eaten. Now, I've been trying to teach people that work for me this for years, and I can't, because things change every day. I'm good at what I do, but every day is a different scenario. So we're pretty much still in the learning process. This has been going on for thirty-eight years, and I still learn every year. I learn something new every year.

What I do, we put these crawfish in a—let me back up. We have some big vats. Like I said, when we went to Texas A&M, it was small, but we got the general idea of what they were trying to do. So we came back and built a facility over here, much, much bigger.

[0:12:56.2]

**Rien Fertel:** And was the restaurant open yet or it was just—

[0:12:58.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** It was getting ready to open. It was getting ready to open. This was in the early stages, so it was a big rush to get this tank fixed and in use before we opened the doors. Now, we had never even purged crawfish before in our lives, but my dad was always on the cutting edge. He always would take chances. If he thought something would benefit or work out different or a better product, he didn't mind spending money and jumping in headfirst to see if it would work or not.

So we come back over here. We built a much bigger facility, something that we could—the first facility we had was probably sixty feet wide by, oh, probably eighty feet long. We could purge thousands of pounds of crawfish. So we started, and we ran into a problem doing it like they were doing over there. We ran into a problem. Labor, it took a lot of labor to get these crawfish out, the way it was set up. So over the years, we've improvised and we've done different things to make labor costs minimized. And not only that, but when you purge crawfish, it's hard on the crawfish.

[0:14:30.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Do you lose some of them, I'm guessing?

[0:14:33.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yes, yes. I've had times when your oxygen gets low, I've lost half of them, fifty percent. It doesn't happen every day, but it does happen sometime. On

average, you can figure about eighteen percent you're going to lose, that won't make the purging system. And what it is, it's hard on them. You're taking them out of a laidback environment. That's why people call them mudbugs. They crawl around in the mud. They breathe mud—muddy water. And I'm putting them in very clean freshwater, turbulent water. That's what those pumps are doing. And, basically, it would be like if you rode a ride at the festival or a circus or somewhere and you got nauseated and you threw up, you know. I hate to say that word, but—

[0:15:34.7]

**Rien Fertel:** But they do. They do vomit.

[0:15:37.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And that's all part of the process. But that water is so turbulent that it's looks like they're boiling in the water, but it's cold water.

[0:15:46.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[0:15:48.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** So after twenty-four hours of this, twenty-four to forty-eight hours, they're clean. They don't have nothing left in them, but they're starving to death. The key to it is to get them out before they start eating each other, because they are cannibals. That's where the tricky part comes in. You want to make sure that they're totally clean but yet not eating one another, because once they start eating one another, then the process has to start all over again.

[0:16:18.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Well, tell me about the taste, and especially the first time your father and you tasted those purged crawfish. Was there a revelation?

[0:16:27.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right, right. The very first time we did some, we took them out and we boiled them, and it was amazing. We couldn't believe the taste was so much different. You could actually taste craw—crawfish actually tastes good. Most people that don't purge, they add a lot, a lot of seasoning and spices, and all that does is to kind of camouflage the taste of those unpurged crawfish. Crawfish actually taste good if you can get them good and clean.

[0:17:01.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah. And Meg, I want to bring you into this.

[0:17:05.8]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Sure.

[0:17:06.4]

**Rien Fertel:** I mean, you are a roving sort of backyard boiler in a way, or mobile boiler, and so our generation, we’re around the same age, we all like to think that we boil crawfish. A lot of people boil crawfish. We grew up in crawfish boils, for sure—

[0:17:22.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Correct.

[0:17:23.4]

**Rien Fertel:** —in people’s backyards. So I’m guessing you follow the same purging process.

[0:17:31.0]

**Megan Arceneaux:** I buy all my crawfish from my dad.

[0:17:33.2]

**Rien Fertel:** From your dad, okay, so it’s the same process.

[0:17:34.5]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[0:17:36.2]

**Rien Fertel:** When you see people doing what we think of as purging with salt and water in an ice chest, do you comment on it? Do you eat those crawfish? What are your thoughts about kind of the modern backyard boil?

[0:17:51.7]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Well, people always want to talk to me about their purging process, because we do have the cleanest crawfish. They want your opinion, first of all, and they want to know, “What do you think about this?” So they’ll show you an ice chest with crawfish in it.

I’m like, “You got a sack of crawfish with some—?”

It’s like, “No.”

“How long they been in there?”

“Oh, about an hour. But we put some salt in it.”

I’m like, “Okay. So you’re killing your crawfish,” and they haven’t—and they get upset.

They’re like, “Well, they’re going to be fine.”

I’m like, “Well,” I was like, “let’s eat, let’s peel them.” I’m like, “You see that black tail right there? That means they’re not purged.” And then I’ll bring my crawfish in. Like when you come to Hawk’s, what’s the difference? Well, we actually have purged

crawfish. Like, you can’t purge crawfish in an hour or two or, like my dad said, overnight.

[0:18:35.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** It’s a process.

[0:18:36.5]

**Megan Arceneaux:** It’s a process. It’s a scientific process. So they’ll get frustrated and upset, but I don’t eat those crawfish.

[0:18:41.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I wish you could, because it’d be a lot more cheaper. [Laughs.]

[0:18:43.4]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Yeah. Yeah, people always want to know, like, “Why are your crawfish more expensive?” Or like, live crawfish: “What’s the cost?” We can’t sell them. We’re going to sell them at the same price we’re buying them from because we got more money tied into them, a lot more, you know. But you’ll taste the difference.

[0:19:00.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** But it’s a superior product.

[0:19:02.7]

**Rien Fertel:** You grew up in a restaurant. What are your earliest memories being here, or do you have early memories about your grandfather?

[0:19:11.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, I’ve been here—they opened, I think, the year that I was born.

[0:19:18.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** The year you was born.

[0:19:18.6]

**Megan Arceneaux:** The year I was born. My mom talks about waiting tables here, so, I mean, I’ve been—

[0:19:24.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Her mom was actually pregnant waiting tables over here, the very first year we opened, until she got to the point where I didn’t trust her being on the floor so—but, yeah, she started.

[0:19:38.7]

**Megan Arceneaux:** So I’ve been in here since—I’ve been in this restaurant since I was in the womb.

[0:19:40.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** One way or another. [Laughs.]

[0:19:41.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Did you work here, or did you work in the back?

[0:19:44.4]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah, I worked here. So, you start out when you’re young, you’re going to make drinks. So we had like a Coke fountain, a fountain.

[0:19:52.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** A fountain person. Be careful what you—

[0:19:54.3]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Right. Oh, by “drink.” I wasn’t mixing cocktails. That wasn’t till I got older, I got my bar card. No, you start out with the fountain drinks. You’re making drinks for the waitresses and stuff, and then you start busing tables. Then you start waitressing. Then you bartend. So I’ve done everything. I’ve done everything but cook. I’ve washed dishes. I never boiled crawfish back here. I started boiling crawfish in my backyard for Festival. So, Festival—I moved to North Carolina, and the year that I moved, that first Festival that I got back in 2007 was my first boil, and it started out small and then it got bigger and bigger.

[0:20:30.1]

**Rien Fertel:** Just describe Festival.

[0:20:31.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, Festival International is a festival that happens in the end of April every year in downtown Lafayette, where we bring artists all from French-speaking countries into Lafayette. So I lived downtown. I lived like a block away from where the main stage was, and so I have friends—I had a huge yard, like three city lots, and people would come camp in my yard, stay in my house. It was like a, you know—

[0:20:54.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Big party.

[0:20:54.4]

**Rien Fertel:** A commune!

[0:20:54.6]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Big party. So it was a commune. So on the fifth day [Laughter], we would boil crawfish, and so my dad would give me some sacks of crawfish, and I had a little pot, and I started boiling. Well, people would just rave about it. Well, it grew and grew and grew until 2015, I had already started my bicycle shop, and I was looking for something else to do to kind of generate some income. And I was, like, “You know what? Let me try my hand at doing this crawfish.” So I came up with Hawk’s Boil Up and started boiling and took off from there.

[0:21:22.5]

**Rien Fertel:** I want to come back to that, but I want to talk about kind of the past and the relationship between the past and present. You mentioned that crawfish wasn’t very popular back in 1978 and [19]82.

[0:21:36.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right, right.

[0:21:37.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Were there any local restaurants or anyone serving crawfish?

[0:21:41.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** They had a few, they had a few, but people—back then, what you have to understand is it was mostly local people. The people—

[0:21:52.6]

**Rien Fertel:** So you wouldn’t drive here to eat crawfish, is what I’m saying, right.

[0:21:58.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** No, no. I think there was a place in Henderson that had them and maybe one in Lafayette, but there was no long lines and nobody ate crawfish. When we started over here in 1982, word got out that this was the best crawfish ever. That’s when people kind of started—. Let me back up. Within a month that we were open, there were long lines outside—

[0:22:26.5]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[0:22:27.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** —because word of mouth. And what you have to understand, back then, my parents didn’t believe in advertising at all. Everything was word of mouth. So if somebody came and ate over here, because we’re way out in the country, basically in the woods, they’d come out here and eat, and they’d bring somebody to show them, “Hey, I got a little secret spot, they got some *good* crawfish, but you’ll never find it. It’s in the woods. You’re going to have to come with me.”

So it’s everybody’s little secret spot. Well it spread like wildfire. Then first thing you know, *those* people were bringing some *other* people, because they had a spot.

Within a month, we had long lines. And we were supposed to close at 10:00 o’clock at night, and I can remember, because I was the bartender at that time, that at 12:30, quarter to 1:00, we were still serving crawfish, just from the people that had been in line that hadn’t got to eat yet.

So, like I said, we only had nine tables, so we decided we needed to enlarge a little bit. So the next year, we enlarged again, expanded the purge system a little bit, because we needed more room. It just kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. He actually added on five times through the course of the—

[0:23:52.0]

**Megan Arceneaux:** You can see it by the floor tiles.

[0:23:54.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Yeah. [All laugh.] Every different color floor tile is an add-on because they didn’t make the same tile anymore.

[0:24:00.5]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Where we’re sitting right now, the last one’s over there, right, Dad, the one in back?

[0:24:03.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Yeah. But over time, as I said, it was growing more and more and more, and, I guess, about fifteen—let’s see. No, about twenty years ago, twenty years ago, that’s when I came into the picture, basically kind of—I didn’t take over back then. That was a year or two after this. But I approached my dad and I said, “We need to renovate the purge system.” I said, “We’re losing too much crawfish.” I said, “It’s taking us too much labor.”

So we devised a system above ground with valves and pumps, same thing as with what we had before, but basically one man could operate it. It takes four, but one man can do it, just takes him a long time. And I’ve kind of tweaked it over the years where our fatality is minimized, labor is minimized. It’s more efficient, also does a better job,

because these crawfish, what I’m doing is I suspend them off the bottom, like that [demonstrates]. Whenever they do their business, they’re not wallowing in that same stuff. They’re always in clean, clean water. But I have to wash this—got to wash these tanks out twice a week, minimum twice a week. And if you see what comes out of crawfish—

[0:25:49.7]

**Megan Arceneaux:** You’ll never eat another dirty crawfish. That’s like you ask, “Will you eat that crawfish that people said they purged?” And that’s me doing air quotes. No, I will not, because I know, because I’ve been in those tanks after my dad drains them—we clean them out two times a week—it’s sludge. It’s disgusting.

[0:26:06.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I have a nephew that was going to school at LSU, and he worked for us and he was at the purge tanks. The first time they cleaned the tanks, he was there, and he called me, said, “Come see, Uncle Anthony.”

So I went, and he said, “You need to make a video and you need to show people this.”

I’m like, “No. No, no, no.”

[0:26:30.1]

**Rien Fertel:** You’d kill the crawfish industry. [Laughter]

[0:26:31.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** That’s what I told him. I said, “We trying to get them to *eat* crawfish. We don’t want them to see the dark side.”

[0:26:37.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Right. The dark side.

[0:26:39.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** He said, “Because if people knew that this comes out of crawfish, they’ll never eat a dirty crawfish again.”

I said, “I hope so. But in the same process, I don’t want them to stop eating them altogether.”

[0:26:49.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Can you say something about the relationship between crawfish and rice fields, like how that works? My drive here, there’s crawfish ponds everywhere.

[0:26:59.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** That’s how the crawfish industry evolved. Remember I was telling you that in the [19]70s—the agricultural industry around here is based on rice. That’s the main crop, because the land is so flat. So they been raising rice for hundreds of years,

about, well, 150 years around here. So, over time, because it's so flat, it was the perfect setup for aquaculture, crawfish mainly. Because in the offseason, you can drive around here, and in every cattle pasture or everybody's yard there's a crawfish chimney. They in the ground. It's part of the ecosystem around here.

[0:27:53.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah. There's a bunch just behind the kitchen. I was looking at them.

[0:27:56.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. So what happens is over time, like I said, when the agriculture side of it started going downhill, the prices weren't good, farmers couldn't hardly make it no more planting rice. They realized that after you harvest the rice crop, the leftover hay in the field, the stubble, they call it, is perfect food for crawfish. So basically after you harvest the rice, you reflood the field. Crawfish come out of the ground at a certain time of the year and have babies. They incubate their eggs all summer underground. Fall, when it cools off, they come out with their young ones.

[0:28:45.5]

**Rien Fertel:** And the only thing you have to do to encourage them is to put water in the field.

[0:28:49.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right.

[0:28:50.2]

**Rien Fertel:** You don't have to seed or—

[0:28:52.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Everybody has to seed, yeah. You got to take crawfish from a—if you want enough to commercially harvest them.

[0:28:58.8]

**Rien Fertel:** I see.

[0:28:59.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Now, if you just want some to eat at your house, no, you don't have to. But nobody around here—it cost the same to sell them or just to eat them. So, basically, I think the rate now is they put about three sacks per acre. See, it's a continuous cycle. So, I'll start like in the springtime, late spring. These farmers have a crawfish pond. You can't raise crawfish and rice in the same field. That's why they rotate. Okay. So wherever you have your rice at, rice is growing, when your rice gets big enough that the crawfish aren't going to damage the crop, they take crawfish from the crawfish pond about three sacks per acre and put in that rice field.

After about six weeks, when the rice is ready to harvest, they drain the water. Once they drain that water in the rice, it gets dry in there. Crawfish bury, they go down, incubate their eggs all summer. So after they harvest this rice, about early fall, these farmers will reflood this field. Okay? These crawfish come back out. It's freshwater.

They come back out with their young. And the leftover rice stubble, because it's flooded, starts decaying. That becomes crawfish food and they eat this. They eat all kind of little microorganisms that this is producing, and I've seen them eat the hay itself. They eat a lot.

[0:30:50.3]

**Rien Fertel:** They're omnivores. They eat everything, right?

[0:30:51.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah, they eat everything in their path, and by doing that, they're growing, they're growing. So about the first part of the year, January, February, those crawfish are getting to be market-size. The farmer starts harvesting them and selling them all through the spring, all through the spring.

Well, at late spring, those crawfish ponds that don't have anything left in them, there's nothing left for the crawfish to eat. But you have to understand he has another field with rice that's growing, so he takes crawfish from that field and puts it in his rice field for a crawfish pond next year. You understand what I'm saying?

[0:31:36.1]

**Rien Fertel:** Right. Yeah, yeah.

[0:31:36.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** It's a continuous cycle.

[0:31:37.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Right. And it’s sustainable. I once interviewed a professor at the Ag Center at LSU, and he said, “Crawfish is the most sustainable crop we have in America,” he said, “the most.” He said it’s just like this cycle, you don’t have to feed them anything, they just eat.

[0:31:56.4]

**Megan Arceneaux:** They’re self-sustainable.

[0:31:57.3]

**Rien Fertel:** They’re self-sustainable.

[0:31:58.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** And years back, like in the [19]70s, I’d say, only local people ate crawfish. Everybody else, if you left from here from this area and you drove thirty-five miles from here, they used them as fish bait. Nobody ate them. Over time, over time, more and more tourists came in and realized that it’s a delicacy. So, over time, price of crawfish started coming up because there was a bigger demand. But once you have a bigger demand, you start raising more crawfish, because the farmers realized they could make a few dollars at it. Getting back to the rice, no price on rice.

So, when a man’s back is against the wall, he’s going to figure out a way to provide for his family. So, they realized that crawfish was the answer because it works in

conjunction with the rice crop. So, over time, demand got bigger, production got higher. Every time the production would get higher—when production was too high, those years, the middle man would go further and further away from here to find new markets to try to get people to start eating them. It kept expanding like that, and then two years later after that, demand was much higher, so production came back up again.

So, it seesawed like that until the point where it's at now. Basically, the whole country's eating crawfish now and they love them. The problem is, crawfish—ninety-five percent of the crawfish industry has to be from down here, because we have the right soil and it's flat. Our soil actually holds water. We have a hardpan underneath, a clay hardpan, and it keeps the water from draining into the soil. Other parts of the country is sandy soil, and water just goes right through. That's why we're able to raise rice in this area.

[0:34:20.1]

**Rien Fertel:** These ponds aren't lined. They're just filled and drained, filled and drained.

[0:34:22.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, no, just filled and drained. It's basically like a swimming pool. The water doesn't drain down. You have to drain it off. But over time, when production would come up, demand had to catch up with it. Once demand passed it up, production had to come up.

[0:34:43.3]

**Rien Fertel:** So, well, talking about sustainability, we have so many dedicated crawfish restaurants now. Where in the [19]70s and [19]80s you had restaurants that might have served crawfish, now you have restaurants that only serve crawfish. You have mobile crawfish shops. You have drive-thru crawfish shops. I’m sure you ship crawfish around the nation sometimes?

[0:35:05.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[0:35:06.8]

**Rien Fertel:** So, are we running out of space to farm crawfish?

[0:35:12.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** No. No.

[0:35:14.6]

**Rien Fertel:** What do farmers have to do to keep up with demand?

[0:35:17.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** No, there’s plenty of area. There’s plenty.

[0:35:20.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And does it make them enough money to sustain them?

[0:35:23.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Yeah, actually, actually, it started off as kind of a sideline gig to make a few dollars on the side, to help. Now it's the main industry. It's bigger than rice. If you're a rice farmer, you have to have crawfish or it ain't gonna work. It don't sustain itself. The rice crop does not sustain itself. It needs help, and it's because the crop prices are the same as they were in the early [19]70s. Production has come up, but the price, the worldwide price—you see, years back, like in the [19]70s, we didn't have as much production. Technology has come a long way. But the whole world was eating rice, and basically, I hate to say it, but the United States held that over a lot of these Third World countries. They kept them in line, because we had the rice, we had the food. Well, now all those other countries, because of technology, they raise their own rice now. So the industry is—I'm not saying *collapsing*, but the price is not sustainable. It can't sustain itself.

[0:36:45.4]

**Rien Fertel:** And what has happened to the price of crawfish?

[0:36:48.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** The price of crawfish keeps going up.

[0:36:50.4]

**Rien Fertel:** So it was fifteen cents a sack.

[0:36:51.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Fifteen cents a pound.

[0:36:53.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Fifteen cents a pound. What's it now?

[0:36:56.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** The other day I heard some of the first ones that started were getting \$4 a pound, right out of the field.

[0:37:03.0]

**Rien Fertel:** What's the highest you've seen in, like, a drought year down here?

[0:37:05.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Probably \$4.

[0:37:06.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Four dollars is the highest.

[0:37:07.7]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Four dollars is the highest I've ever seen it.

[0:37:09.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Can you foresee it getting a dollar higher ever, in a decade or so?

[0:37:14.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yes.

[0:37:15.9]

**Rien Fertel:** It will get there?

[0:37:16.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** It could happen next year. It depends on the production. You see, this year, when they started, you see, they started about three weeks earlier this year than they normally do, because it was a very mild winter.

[0:37:29.9]

**Rien Fertel:** There's no freezes.

[0:37:31.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Correct.

[0:37:31.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** So they started earlier. Crawfish is still small yet, though. So when they started, the price started out about \$4, but it came down quickly. I want to say right now it's about \$2.50 a pound, somewhere in that area. But this year versus last year, it started at about \$3.50. Well, it didn't go down for about a month, month and a half.

That's when it finally started coming down, because the production was getting better and better. But when they first started, there wasn't much production. It's not like that this year. They're actually catching a lot of crawfish. Size is no good yet, though. So the price has to come down because there's too much crawfish and too much small crawfish. The market is a lot better for your select crawfish, your larger crawfish.

[0:38:24.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Can you talk about that? Because Hawk's is not only famous for the purging, but also for the select or the way that you size crawfish. Can you talk about how you size and the size you—

[0:38:34.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Everything is handpicked. Everything is hand-graded. We don't have a mechanical grader. We have people that do this all day long. And basically what happened, how it got started, was my dad wanted a quality product that he could be proud of, and he didn't want to just sell crawfish. He wanted to have something different than everybody. So that when you would leave from here and your belly was full and you said, "That's the best I ever had," he knew you'd come back.

We have customers—this is no joke—we have customers that come during the season three times a week and been come eating over here for thirty years. They actually can't wait till we open, because that's part of their lives, and those people are basically family to us. We've been around here for so long, some of our customers have been here

for so long, everybody’s on a first-name basis. In the off-season, when none of this is going on and taking place, we get Christmas cards from them, and it’s like family.

[0:39:44.1]

**Rien Fertel:** So who do you buy crawfish from? And when the crawfish come in in sacks, in those purple sacks, are they already hand-selected, like, “These are larges”—

[0:39:56.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** No, no.

[0:39:56.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Then what do you do with those?

[0:39:59.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** No, they’re not already graded. They have people that grade crawfish, but it’s always mechanical graders. Okay. So what I’m doing, I’m not like everybody else. Some people, if they just throw them in a pot and boiling them, it doesn’t really matter too much. I’m washing them for forty-eight hours sometimes. Now, remember me telling you a while ago that the system is very hard on them? If that crawfish is injured when I put him in the tank, he’s not going to survive, because it’s already hard on him. He has to be in the perfect physical shape to have a chance of surviving through this process. So these people that grade with a mechanical grader—

[0:40:43.0]

**Megan Arceneaux:** You're getting dead crawfish in there.

[0:40:44.7]

**Rien Fertel:** It beats them up.

[0:40:46.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right, right. It beats them up, and when they get here, they're already in poor shape to start off with. That's why I try to buy good crawfish directly from the farmer, directly from the field. But people don't understand I have to coordinate everything so that these crawfish can come right out of the water to be put right back in the water. Less stress possible. They survive better.

So when I take them out two days later, I got these crew of people. There's some big tables on wheels, and they roll against those big vats, and as we dump them on the table, we pick out all the dead ones, all the grass, all the stuff that shouldn't be there, and also the small ones, because there are some in there. I'll lose about, on average, about eighteen percent dead, but I'll also lose probably sometime another ten percent that's too small, that won't make the grade.

[0:41:46.7]

**Rien Fertel:** What do you do with those?

[0:41:47.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I have a friend of mine who got a fishpond, feed them to the fish.

[Laughs.]

[0:41:52.4]

**Rien Fertel:** But you don’t make étouffée?

[0:41:54.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** No, no, no. That’s too much trouble. But we peel some for our étouffées, but we peel the good crawfish.

So basically what happens is when all this comes together, and I lose eighteen percent from the dead, I lose another ten percent from the small, my crawfish costs *way* more than everybody else’s. But I have a much better product. And when people come and eat that have never eaten here before, and when they leave, they say, “Ooh, my god, that was so good.”

I say, “You won’t realize how good they are until you eat here about twice and then go eat somewhere else, and you’re going to be very disappointed, and you’re going to say, ‘Oh, my god, that’s the difference.’ Eat twice here and then go eat somewhere else.” And that’s the best advertisement you can make, you can do.

[0:42:55.8]

**Megan Arceneaux:** I can’t eat anywhere else. You just can’t. And I have friends that once they have it, like, they started, like I said, eating in my backyard, and they had never been here before, now they come here and they can’t go anywhere else.

[0:43:06.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Everybody over the years would ask me, and different reporters would come around, “What makes yours so much better than everybody else’s?” They’re cleaner, plain and simple. They’re clean. They’re so clean that when you eat the crawfish—remember I was telling you this—you can actually taste what crawfish is supposed to be like.

[0:43:30.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** The fat’s juicy, like it’s more buttery. It’s just cleaner.

[0:43:34.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** There’s no fishy taste. There’s no rancid taste. There’s no grit. There’s no—all you’re eating is good, clean crawfish. It’s thoroughly cleaned. Now, there’s people out there that so say claim to purge crawfish, and there’s different ways to purge crawfish. You can pour water in a bucket and call them purged. Purge is a small word with a very, very big meaning. [All laugh.] I have friends of mine that so say purge crawfish. They purge crawfish with the same water from in the crawfish pond. So say it does a fantastic job. And I say it can’t, because they’re coming out of that. They’re dirty when they come out of that.

[0:44:22.6]

**Rien Fertel:** You have debates.

[0:44:23.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Yeah. And then you have other people that do different things, too, but we've learned—like I say, we've been doing this almost forty years now—we've learned that the way we do it is the optimal way to get the best product. It's the most expensive way too.

[0:44:42.7]

**Rien Fertel:** I think you sell in three- to five-pound servings?

[0:44:45.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** We have a three-pound serving and five-pound serving.

[0:44:47.6]

**Rien Fertel:** What are the prices on them? Or maybe last year, if you don't know this year.

[0:44:50.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Usually about \$32 for a five-pound serving of crawfish, and about \$20 for a three-pound order.

[0:44:55.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. What would it have been, say, in 1980s?

[0:44:59.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** When we started it in 1982, a five-pound order of crawfish was \$8.75.

[0:45:08.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Did it ever shock, like, old-timers that crawfish has now tripled in price?

[0:45:17.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

[0:45:19.4]

**Rien Fertel:** And does it put them off, where they’re like, “I ain’t paying that,” or is it—

[0:45:23.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, yeah.

[0:45:23.7]

**Rien Fertel:** You always have those. Okay.

[0:45:24.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** You always have that type, “I’m not paying that much for crawfish. I’m gonna wait till they go down.” You see, in years past—

[0:45:30.6]

**Rien Fertel:** But they don’t go down, right?

[0:45:32.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Not anymore. But those old-timers, and even some of the younger people that were raised with that attitude. Because what you have to understand, like we’ve just talked about before, many, many years ago, that’s what would happen. As the season progressed, there was an abundance of crawfish, so the price would go down, so everybody would say, “I’m gonna wait till they go down in the spring. Then I’m gonna eat them.” Well, now the market is so big, the whole country’s eating crawfish.

[0:46:02.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Right. And you can buy crawfish for pretty cheap at every grocery store, boiled.

[0:46:06.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right, right. But now because the demand is so great, the price doesn’t go down much. So, if you want to eat crawfish, if you wait too long, you, hate to say it, shit out of luck. So, now things are kind of changing. People aren’t waiting till

they go down anymore, because they know they're not going to go down. If they hungry for crawfish, they just have to eat them. And, trust me, the crawfish farmers are not making a killing. They're barely getting by. It costs us more and more to raise any type of crop.

[0:46:42.7]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Labor.

[0:46:44.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I don't farm anymore. I got out of farming in 2000, and now I look around, because some of my friends are still doing it, and it's bad. I feel sorry for them. One piece of equipment is a half a million dollars. A combine to cut and harvest the rice is half a million dollars. Tractors, \$400,000 apiece. So when you start adding all this up and you still getting prices, crap prices, from in the early [19]70s, it doesn't add up.

[0:47:16.3]

**Rien Fertel:** How do you occupy the other half of your year when you're not running the restaurant?

[0:47:21.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I raise cattle, yeah, and I take care of a lot of some rental properties and stuff my family own.

[0:47:29.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And, Meg, I want to ask, what does your schedule look like? I'm sure it follows the restaurant schedule. And how often do you travel, where do you travel, what's your—is it once a week? Is it weekends?

[0:47:42.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** No. This past season, 2019, was the busiest we've been in the four years that we'd started. So, I run a bike shop in downtown Lafayette, and so that's six days a week. So, on Wednesdays and Thursdays, we boil at downtown as well. So, we boil twice in a week, regular thing. We've been doing that. It's our fourth year. That's on Wednesday and Thursday nights we're boiling. So we're serving downtown Lafayette, and it really caught on. Like, people, we have our regulars like they do. We move about fifteen sacks a night, and it's great. But, I mean, so I'm working seven days a week for four months, though, because I'm also traveling. I'm going to New Orleans. I have backyard boils in Lafayette and—

[0:48:25.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** She caters a lot.

[0:48:27.6]

**Megan Arceneaux:** I cater, do a lot of catering.

[0:48:28.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Weddings.

[0:48:29.5]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Weddings, rehearsal dinners.

[0:48:30.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** On weekends.

[0:48:30.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Yeah, on weekends. Sometimes during the week, though, I'll drive to New Orleans to do like a boil on a Tuesday. It just depends.

[0:48:38.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** For about four months we don't neither one of us get very much rest.

[0:48:41.8]

**Megan Arceneaux:** No.

[0:48:43.0]

**Rien Fertel:** I want to ask one question before I forget it, but do you use the same spice recipe, and what is that spice?

[0:48:48.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

[0:48:48.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Everything’s exact.

[0:48:49.3]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Everything is exactly—I’m boiling Hawk’s crawfish.

[0:48:51.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** She’s basically taking my product from here and bringing it on the road.

[0:48:55.5]

**Rien Fertel:** And what can you say about that spice recipe? Anything that you can say about how you boil it?

[0:49:01.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** We haven’t changed in the whole time that we—when we started, my dad kind of came up with this recipe and it stuck. Everybody loves it. And there’s an old saying, “If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.” Because over time, we’ve had other people that came to us said, “Try this. This one’s better. Try this.”

[0:49:24.3]

**Rien Fertel:** This blend or something?

[0:49:25.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right. Nope, ain’t trying nothing. If it’s not broken, we’re not fixing it.

[0:49:30.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And do you do different spice levels?

[0:49:32.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Correct.

[0:49:33.5]

**Rien Fertel:** Did you ever think you would get into the crawfish business, and did your father persuade you not to? I grew up in a restaurant, and I remember my mom telling me as a kid, “The one thing you’re not allowed to do is go into the restaurant business.” I did, I went into the restaurant business in my twenties. But did you—were you—

[0:49:51.3]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, I didn't know I was going to be in the restaurant business. I knew I was going to be in some sort of business. It's just in my blood. It's just what I do. I'm just an entrepreneur like my grandfather. I grew up riding around with my dad and my grandfather. I'm an only child and I would spend—my dad was always working, so I stayed at my grandparents' in the summertime and every holiday and every weekend. So that meant that I was just with my grandfather or with my dad, doing whatever they were doing, and I'd follow them, I'd watch them.

My grandfather liked to play the commodities. He had his people he'd go visit and do stuff. My grandfather wasn't a really—I never saw him work. I just saw him delegate, but I learned a lot from that. That's how you make it in businesses. You have to know how to talk to people, you have to be respected in the community, and that's what I got from him. I wanted to be that person.

And my dad, he just worked from before I'd wake up in the morning till way after I got home from school he worked, and he still does. So now he's able to raise his cattle and work on his stuff, but, I mean, he's already done—he's been working since he was fifteen years old.

[0:50:53.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Self-employed since I'm fifteen.

[0:50:56.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Self-employed since he was fifteen. He's never worked for anyone.

[0:50:59.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I’ve never had a job.

[0:51:00.4]

**Megan Arceneaux:** So I was like, “That’s—.” And I watched my grandfather, same thing, never worked for anybody. He was in the Army. That’s probably the last person he worked for, and that was it. And I was like, “You know what? Yeah, it’s hard work, it looks—but I want to be self-employed.” And so I started the bike shop, and then this crawfish boil kind of grew from my backyard to getting a trailer, to getting equipment, and it’s been growing ever since. And then one day, if I’m fortunate enough, I’ll be able to come in and take over the restaurant and all that.

[0:51:29.2]

**Rien Fertel:** So that was my next question. Would you?

[0:51:31.3]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, that’s the plan.

[0:51:32.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** I’m grooming her right now as we speak. [Laughs.]

[0:51:34.8]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Yeah. I mean, we've already got things in the works. Like, I need to come in, I should be here now, helping him, learn how to clean all this stuff up and do all—because it's a lot.

[0:51:43.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** In fact, that gives me an idea. [Laughs.]

[0:51:45.0]

**Megan Arceneaux:** After this, I'm going to be mopping floors.

[0:51:47.4]

**Rien Fertel:** So there will be a third generation to run Hawk's.

[0:51:51.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, definitely.

[0:51:52.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Yeah, and that's probably—and if I don't have children, then that's probably it, unless one of my cousins want to take over, which I would love that. But that's why they say, like, after the third generation, that's usually when it goes. Just depends.

[0:52:03.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** The problem with a restaurant, there's not a whole lot of money in a restaurant, which I'm sure you know. It can make you a living if it's done right and done well, but there's so many other things that the younger generation can do now that's not as stressful, doesn't take as much labor, and they can make a much better living at it. That's why a lot of times you see all these restaurants, anywhere you live, there's always a For Rent sign after a few months of when they open, because there's not a whole lot of profit in that.

[0:52:37.6]

**Megan Arceneaux:** It's also a lot of work.

[0:52:41.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** We do it because it's our pride and joy. We do it for the—trust me, I wouldn't do it if it wasn't profitable, but we do a lot of it for the reason that we are the best and we have the best product and people tell us we have the best, and they been with us for so long. I could make more money doing other things, but it's part of history, and we've been here for so long that it's kind of part of the landscape around here. So I don't want that to die. I want to carry on the tradition.

[0:53:20.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah, that's beautiful. I have just one or two more questions. So I fondly remember my first time here. I was probably thirteen, so it was 1992, [19]93. I was born in 1980. And it must have been my mom heard about this place, maybe my stepfather,

but we drove out here, the family, me and my two brothers and my parents, and I remember my parents—this was before cell phones. I remember us getting lost. I remember them probably like—

[0:53:55.8]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Having an argument.

[0:53:56.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Bickering a little bit. [Laughter] All right. And then I remember it being very late at night, all very tired, right. They both worked full-time jobs. It was very hard for them to get a night off together.

[0:54:11.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah, seen it thousands of times.

[0:54:11.2]

**Rien Fertel:** And they come in here, and I remember seeing a light, like in the distance, right? It was very dark out here.

[0:54:17.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Go towards the light. Always go towards the light. [Laughter]

[0:54:20.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And there was a pool table, I remember. I just remember sitting on top of the pool table and just like waiting and being hungry and grouchy.

[0:54:26.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah, that's a long time ago.

[0:54:27.1]

**Rien Fertel:** So I remember that, and I've come here a few times, like on my own with friends driving out here, and there's that experience of driving here. I'm from the south side of Lafayette, so driving here from Lafayette. But I've also had your crawfish more recently in New Orleans at our friend Simone's old place, her market, and other places in New Orleans. And I could argue both ways, but is Hawk's special because you come out here to get lost, and is that specialness lost when it comes to you, or is it more special now that it can come to you? It's both ways, right?

[0:55:03.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** It's works both ways, yeah.

[0:55:04.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** It’s both ways, but it’s really great because I’m the person who’s going out to the community and reminding them that we’re still here and that they haven’t been here in a while. But I come here twice a week.

[0:55:13.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Some people love—

[0:55:14.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah, to pick up and—

[0:55:15.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** No, I come here twice a week to eat. My wife and I come here twice a week, so I like to bring people too. So I’m not going to come and eat here alone. I’m going to grab a daiquiri or a drink or something and get in the car, and I like to come at sunset, because we’re riding into the sunset, right, because we’re going west. And so we drive in, and it’s the most beautiful, because, like my dad was saying, everything is just so flat, you can see for miles, and so you can see how beautiful. You can’t see that in Lafayette. So I’m like, “Let’s get in the car. Let’s go eat some Hawk’s.” I mean, I’m already driving out here three, four times a week, but I’m going to also come eat.

[0:55:46.8]

**Rien Fertel:** So you get the experience too.

[0:55:47.8]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, I get the experience. I love the experience.

[0:55:49.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Some people—the question you just asked. Some people love the adventure, because, like I say, we're so far from the beaten path, it's an adventure. Some people love that. Some people don't like adventures. So that's when she comes into play. She brings it to them.

[0:56:04.2]

**Rien Fertel:** I love that, yeah.

[0:56:05.3]

**Megan Arceneaux:** But they want it. So that's what I'm saying, my dad and I, we have the same customers, right, the people from downtown.

[0:56:10.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** It's a lot of customers that go both ways.

[0:56:12.3]

**Megan Arceneaux:** They go there, and they'll tell me that mine are better. [Laughter]

[0:56:16.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, really?

[0:56:17.2]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. I think that’s hilarious. That’s my favorite thing. They’re like, “Don’t tell your daddy.”

[0:56:21.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** And then the next week, they come and tell me that mine is way better than hers.

[0:56:24.0]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Right. So it’s all BS, because it’s the same crawfish, it’s the same seasoning.

[0:56:27.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Like I said, a lot of those people are almost like family to us.

[0:56:30.4]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Yeah, and we love that, and that’s what keeps us in business. During those hard times when, like, you’re working, you know, sixteen hours a day and you’re tired and you’re driving back or whatever, I love it. Like I’ll come in here after a boil,

and I'll drop off more crawfish I didn't sell, and I'm disappointed I didn't get to sell out, but I'm lucky enough to bring those crawfish back immediately so my dad can sell them the next day or whatever, put them back. And I'll come in and we'll see people from the community, and I'll eat a hamburger or something, sit down. That's what it's all about. It's about the community. It's about carrying on my grandfather's name. It's about my dad being a second generation, me being a third generation, and it's just carrying on the legacy. That's what we're doing. And there's nothing that feels any better than that. You can't tell me be going to work at the same—because it pretty much jobs—

[0:57:15.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Every day's different.

[0:57:15.6]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Every day's different. And the thing that—

[0:57:18.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** It's an adventure to get here, but it's also an adventure to be here.

[0:57:20.2]

**Megan Arceneaux:** I'm entering my midlife, right? I'm about to turn forty soon, and I'm thinking, like, "Man, I've been self-employed for ten years," and it's scary, because it's hard. No one tells you about all the negative stuff about being self-employed. There's no one else that's going to—you have to get up every morning and do it. You can't call in to

work, because there’s nobody to call in to. [Laughter] You know what I mean? And with that said, I wouldn’t trade it. Some days I think about it, and I’ll talk to my dad. I’ll call him when I’m having bad weeks or months at the shop. I’m like, “I don’t know if it’s going to make it.”

He’s like, “Yeah, it’s just a bad week, just a bad month. There’s always tomorrow. It’s going to be okay.”

[0:57:55.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** My mother always told us—she has a saying and she uses this over and over again.

[0:58:01.8]

**Rien Fertel:** And she’s still around?

[0:58:03.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. She’s eighty-eight years old. We had a birthday party for her the other day. In fact, I’m going to tell you a story about that too. But her saying, her favorite saying, “And this too shall pass.” So when things get bad, especially being self-employed, when you think—

[0:58:20.2]

**Megan Arceneaux:** That might be it. This might be it.

[0:58:22.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** —that might be it because you can’t handle it. And we’re going to miss that when she’s gone. She’ll sit us down and say, “And this too shall pass.”

[0:58:29.5]

**Megan Arceneaux:** She’ll pat you. [Demonstrates]

[0:58:30.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** “Tomorrow’s going to be a better day.”

[0:58:32.0]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Yeah, she’ll pat you on the hand.

[0:58:32.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** And it is. But getting back to her, she was one of the driving forces over here.

[0:58:42.5]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah, tell me about that. What role did she play here?

[0:58:44.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** My dad—I laugh a lot—my dad did the crawfish thing. But my mother made sure that the kitchen functioned professionally and on point. And that takes some doing, because we wanted—everybody that comes and eat over here, it doesn’t

matter if you come and don't come back for another two years, we want you to have the exact same experience and we want you to know what you're going to get before you come. So quality doesn't change. When you sell nothing but top-quality stuff, you know it don't change.

But my mother, when this place first started, she stayed here till the wee hours of the morning to make sure it was clean and everything was on point. Everything had to be perfect. And I tell everybody—and most of them, some of them don't believe me—my mother is responsible for inventing crawfish dip.

[0:59:56.5]

**Rien Fertel:** Tell us what crawfish dip is.

[0:59:58.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Basically now anytime we go to the store, they have different types of dips everywhere.

[1:00:04.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Dat Dips or whatever they want to call it, yeah.

[1:00:07.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right. They have all kind of brands. You can buy them on the shelf. Even like some of the—I'm not going to name them by name—some of the chicken places have a dipping sauce.

[1:00:22.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Right. They're like mayonnaise-based and spiced. Right.

[1:00:25.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right. That's the same sauce that my mother invented many, many—because when we were kids—

[1:00:30.1]

**Rien Fertel:** And you dip the tails in it, yeah.

[1:00:30.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right.

[1:00:32.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** And it started out with crawfish.

[1:00:33.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right. Remember I was telling you about the little crawfish boils we'd have in our backyard when we were kids. My sister didn't like horseradish cocktail sauce. Because back then, that's all the dip they had. My mother would make a little sauce with mayonnaise, ketchup-based sauce. And she would eat that. So while she was making it, she'd just make enough for everybody, and we didn't have to fool with

cocktail sauce. So when we opened this restaurant, we used her recipe, and everybody loved it.

[1:01:11.2]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Now you should see the things we got to make on Wednesday just to keep that rolling.

[1:01:14.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** When you look throughout not only the crawfish industry but other industries, too, it's the same little sauce. That's that sauce my mother started.

[1:01:23.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[1:01:24.9]

**Megan Arceneaux:** So my grandmother invented crawfish dip.

[1:01:26.4]

**Rien Fertel:** And what is her name?

[1:01:29.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Denise. Denise Arceneaux. She just turned eighty-eight years old three days ago.

[1:01:32.8]

**Rien Fertel:** I want to just finish up with two small questions, one big question. Because I love Louisiana nicknames for our grandparents, what do you call your grandmother and grandfather?

[1:01:45.3]

**Megan Arceneaux:** “Ma” and “Pa.”

[1:01:45.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Ma and Pa. Okay. Ma and Pa. Simple.

[1:01:48.2]

**Megan Arceneaux:** See, I had two Ma and Pas. So it was Pa Hawk, but my grandmothers, just Ma. Yeah.

[1:01:55.0]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** But Pa Hawk.

[1:01:56.2]

**Megan Arceneaux:** And I’m actually named—my middle name, my grandmother and I have the same middle name. So we’re both—she’s Denise Imilda and I’m Megan Imilda.

[1:02:03.8]

**Rien Fertel:** How do you spell that?

[1:02:05.6]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Imilda, I-m-i-l-d-a. So my initials are MIA. [Laughs.]

[1:02:11.9]

**Rien Fertel:** When did your father pass away?

[1:02:17.6]

**Megan Arceneaux:** 2009.

[1:02:18.8]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** 2009.

[1:02:20.0]

**Megan Arceneaux:** January.

[1:02:20.5]

**Rien Fertel:** So Hawk's, it had a lot of success by then.

[1:02:25.4]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah.

[1:02:26.0]

**Rien Fertel:** But even in the past decade, it's even gotten bigger.

[1:02:28.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah, it's grown by leaps and bounds. We actually have—you see, I took over the restaurant in the year 2001, I think it was, or 2000, somewhere around in that area.

[1:02:42.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And did he retire?

[1:02:42.3]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right, yeah. He was at a point where he was getting at the age where he didn't want to have to be stressed out over this anymore. About the same time, when I quit farming, I kind of just stepped into the picture because we all knew that we had to continue it. Remember I was telling you a while ago, we had to keep it going because it's part of the history around here. So, by the time that I quit farming, I just stepped into the picture and I took over, and doing the exact same thing. And our number-one goal was quality, plain and simple, clean and quality. It's more expensive thataway, but it works. Now, over time, technology has come into play. You were telling me a while ago about you and your family coming and getting lost. I can remember all night on the phone—

[1:03:43.5]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Telling people directions.

[1:03:45.1]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** —on the landline, on the phone, giving directions how to get here. People would call crying. I’m not exaggerating. Crying because they were out here in the country, in the woods, and they were lost and didn’t know where they were. They’d stop at somebody’s house, knock on the door.

[1:04:03.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** “Where’s Hawk’s?”

[1:04:04.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** So, they would call. I said, “Where are you right now?”

“Well, I’m at—hold on a second. What’s your name?”

And I could hear them on the phone, and they would say the name. I said, “I know exactly where you’re at.” I said, “Stay there. I’m going to come get you.” I had a vehicle, I’d go down the road, get them, and bring them over here. A lot of times, when they were finished, drive them back to the interstate eight miles away to get them in the right direction.

Now it’s much easier. There’s GPS now. There’s cell phones. Hardly anybody calls for directions anymore. We get tourists now from all over the world, and nobody has to ask directions. They just tap on the phone and it brings them right to the front door.

[1:04:45.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah, so that's my question. What would your dad think about that, that people from every country on Earth find their way to this old rice community?

[1:04:54.5]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** In the last ten years, it's grown because of technology. We've had years, last year, in one night—I can remember because we was laughing about it after we had closed that night—in one night, we had people from Jerusalem, we had Chinese tourists, we had people from Spain, France, two different ones from France, and two different people from Canada all in the same night. [Laughter] And there's a little joke about that too. The people from Canada were speaking French. So I guess they thought from us being living in Cajun country, in Arcadia—

[1:05:41.7]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Arcadia Parish.

[1:05:42.2]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** —Arcadia area, that everybody should talk French. Just so happened that night, there was nobody in here that could speak French, all my employees, myself included. That was fun, to say the least. [Laughter] But, yeah, now with the invention of Facebook and other things like in that nature, we're able to reach many, many more people throughout the world.

[1:06:11.5]

**Rien Fertel:** You've been profiled in the *New York Times*.

[1:06:12.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Right. Oh, yeah, definitely.

[1:06:14.1]

**Rien Fertel:** So what would he think about that, say about that, or what—

[1:06:18.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** He probably wouldn't believe it today, because all this came after the time that he passed away. It had grown to that point, but it was kind of at a standstill before technology—

[1:06:33.5]

**Megan Arceneaux:** My grandmother's alive and she talks about it, because we're proud. Like, we've been in *New York Times*, been in the *Washington Post*.

[1:06:39.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Been in *New York Times* twice.

[1:06:41.1]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Yeah, you know, like, different magazines.

[1:06:42.6]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** *Wall Street Journal*.

[1:06:43.6]

**Megan Arceneaux:** *Wall Street Journal*. And so we’ll bring her the clippings and we’ll bring her the magazines and show her, and it’s a sense of pride, because we’re proud. “Here we are, carrying on what y’all started. We wouldn’t be able to do that or have these accolades without y’all having the drive.” Who would’ve thought in the middle of nowhere—I mean, literally we’re in the middle—that a restaurant would survive for thirty-seven years, thirty-eight years? It’s a gamble.

[1:07:06.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Every time somebody does an article about us in one of the major, whether it be newspapers or magazines, there’s a boost of business. A few years back, *Maxim* magazine had did an article about us. Business boosted. Two years ago, *New York Times*. Business skyrocketed.

[1:07:29.6]

**Rien Fertel:** So people still find you.

[1:07:30.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[1:07:31.7]

**Megan Arceneaux:** It's cool.

[1:07:32.7]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** It's pretty cool, yeah. And we're not braggers. We're very low-key people. You can leave from here and go five miles up the road and people don't know the history of this place. Because we get a lot of, like I said, tourists and out-of-town people. The local people, this is not what they are about because they live out here. That's part of their lives also. The crawfish thing, basically they fool with that every day. What we're catering to is people that don't get them every day, but we want them to have a great experience when they do come, something they'll never forget, and that's what brings them back.

[1:08:20.4]

**Rien Fertel:** I think that's a good place to stop.

[1:08:22.4]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Cool.

[1:08:23.1]

**Rien Fertel:** I want to thank y'all.

[1:08:24.3]

**Megan Arceneaux:** Thank you, man. This is great.

[1:08:25.9]

**Anthony Arceneaux:** Appreciate it, man.

[1:08:26.6]

**Rien Fertel:** This was wonderful. Thank you.

[End of interview]