



**Sunny Dear**  
**Southern Maid Donuts and Flour Company**  
**Garland, Texas**

\*\*\*

Date: August 16, 2021

Location: Southern Maid Donuts and Flour Company, Garland, TX

Interviewer: Jaime Cantrell

Transcription: Technitype Transcripts

Length: Forty-eight minutes

Project: Southern Baking

**Jaime Cantrell:** This is Dr. Jaime Cantrell, a contributor with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021, and we're in Dallas, Texas, specifically Garland, out on Cavalier Avenue at Southern Maid Donuts. I'm with Sunny Dear, and I'm going to ask her to introduce herself and give your date of birth, please.

[00:00:28]

**Sunny Dear:** My name is Sunny Dear. My birthdate is June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1960.

[00:00:37]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Thank you for speaking with me today.

[00:00:40]

**Sunny Dear:** Sure.

[00:00:41]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So tell me a little bit about your early life.

[00:00:45]

**Sunny Dear:** Always donuts. [Laughter] I just remember being young, my parents had donut shops. They actually owned donut shops back then, so they would be up at 3:00 o'clock in the morning, they would take off and they would go to the donut shop. My mom would come back and get us at 7:00 o'clock to take us for breakfast and then take us to school, and then she would be home by the time I got home from school, because,

obviously, they were—well, they were not done. The stores back then were still open until 10:00 o'clock at night. But we would go back up to the store and hang out with them. But on the weekends, we were up there, so I, even on the weekends, would go in with my dad sometimes at 3:00 o'clock in the morning and make donuts just for fun.

[00:01:30]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So when you say that your mom picked you up for breakfast, were you eating donuts for breakfast?

[00:01:36]

**Sunny Dear:** Yes. [Laughter]

[00:01:36]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Do you remember other breakfasts that you had?

[00:01:40]

**Sunny Dear:** If she made breakfast at home, it was oatmeal. [laughter] But she would bring home day-old donuts, so the next morning if it was a weekend or something like that, she would just warm that donut up or put it in the pan or heat it up or something like that. But, no, she would pick us up and take us back up to the donut shop and eat donuts and orange juice.

[00:02:02]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So tell me about your mother.

[00:02:02]

**Sunny Dear:** There's no words to describe that lady. She was everything. And people that knew her, she was so smart, she was so business-minded, she just knew something about everything. If you asked a question or brought up something, she knew information about it. She was very well-liked, very sweet lady. When she passed away and I told people, if I called them or whatever, they were just so upset. Even vendors that would come in used to just come in and visit and talk to her. There was one gentleman that used to just call her on the road, even though—you know, just to get some advice from her.

[Laughter] So, just smart, smart lady.

[00:02:49]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So what kind of vendors was your mother working with?

[00:02:54]

**Sunny Dear:** Ingredient vendors, mainly, because the ingredients that we purchased to blend the donut flour with. We're talking some of the big companies around, JM Swank, Petori [phonetic], Brenntag, just a lot of those people that she's been dealing with all these years, so she's basically ran this company, being the head part of it for the last fifty years.

[00:03:25]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So what do you remember about your adolescence or your early twenties?

[00:03:34]

**Sunny Dear:** At that time, I worked here till almost the 1980s and then I got married young, and my husband and I at the time, my husband was a sales rep here, so we would go on the road and open donut shops, but then we decided to open up our own donut shop, so I actually had a donut shop for a short period of time. I didn't stay married very long. I was trying to go to school and balance the two, so it was a very short-lived thing.

But donuts is something that I'm very familiar with. I grew up behind the counter, so people oriented, you know, selling donuts. I can do that with my eyes closed. It was just something that I grew up with and that I still do love and enjoy to this day. I don't do it anymore.

So in my eighties, I wasn't really here or had much to do with Southern Maid at that time. I did come back in the year 2000, is when I came back to work here.

[interruption]

[00:04:54]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So you came back in 2000.

[00:04:56]

**Sunny Dear:** Came back in 2000 and I was doing the shipping, the order taking, answering the phone, keeping up with the ingredients in the back that I resell. My mom was doing all the purchasing, payables, payroll, that kind of thing. She was just so smart at what she did. It was so easy and the times were easy. If you wanted to order something, you would pick up the phone and call an order. Today it's a little bit different with the COVID thing going on. There are things that are not out there available. Simple ingredients like dextrose that, you know, should be available, all of a sudden we don't have it, is what you hear. It's just a whole different story these days. I wish she was here sometimes. [Laughter]

[00:05:52]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So when you say ingredients, without revealing family secrets, we're talking about the basics of flour, sugar.

[00:06:00]

**Sunny Dear:** Right. There's just basic ingredients that everybody uses for their donut flour. I think where the difference comes in is the amounts of what people put in it, you know, how they want to come off. Somebody's donut may be soft or softer or a different color, a bakery yellow-type color or something that you may see in a grocery store or something. So, yes, those are the type ingredients.

[00:06:26]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So how does Southern Maid's sort of classic glazed donut look? You talked about color, you talked about texture, softness. What is your product and how is that different from, say, Krispy Kreme, you know? I'm thinking of Dunkin' Donuts, too, you know, large national chains.

[00:06:50]

**Sunny Dear:** I think, number one, our donut is white in color if you bite into it. I think some of the other products, like I said, out there, there might be a tinge of sort of a yellowish color to it. The bite is different. There may be donuts out there that are just soft, pillowy, or something. Ours actually has a texture to it, a bite to it. I think our donut is fantastic. It doesn't have that sweet taste that you get from a Krispy Kreme donut. There's so much sugar in their glaze or whatever they're putting in there. I don't know. The Dunkin' Donuts, I'm sorry, I— [Laughter] A little bit more harder texture or something. It's been so long, I haven't had one in a million years. [Laughter]

[00:07:46]

**Jaime Cantrell:** That's fair. So let's return back to when you first started traveling to set up franchises. Where were you traveling to? Was it the Ark-La-Tex region? And then also where was the store that you ended up setting up?

[00:08:07]

**Sunny Dear:** So in the seventies when I was late teens at that time, we were traveling mainly down South Texas, Beaumont, the Nederland area, even over to Ocean Springs,

and I traveled with my mom, so it was she and I in the car together. The guys might be traveling with the equipment or something at that time. But we spent a lot of time together traveling, doing those things, and it was so much fun. I didn't do as many openings as she did, because it was a short period of time, but Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, just a few over there because there was that area franchise there, of course, South Texas, West Texas.

So my dad was a sales rep. He worked here as well when I was growing up, so our family vacations always involved going to a donut shop. [Laughter] So we spent a *lot* of time on the road in West Texas, it seemed like.

[00:09:12]

**Jaime Cantrell:** I'm interested in the sort of gender division of labor, you know, like you and your mom in the car and her responsibilities with the business, and then the guys in the back with machinery.

[00:09:29]

**Sunny Dear:** Yeah. [Laughter]

[00:09:30]

**Jaime Cantrell:** What type of machinery?

[00:09:32]

**Sunny Dear:** The donut equipment that they would be taking to set up at the donut shops, like the fryer, the glazer, the cutting table, the proof box. Those major components are what you have to have for a donut shop, the mixer, that kind of thing.

The donut shop that my husband and I opened up—I was eighteen at the time—over on Shiloh and Ferguson, it was called Sunny’s Southern Maid. So we actually had that sign up on the top. We would go in at 3:00 o’clock in the morning. I was trying to go to school at that time, so I would help out till about 7:00 or 8:00, and I had a front girl that would come in. I would leave out and then go to Richland and try to go to school the rest of the day. It just didn’t last long. I was too young, too young and silly. [Laughter]

[00:10:27]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So you mentioned the proofing process. How have practices changed over time from the sixties and seventies to the 2000s, to the 2020s?

[00:10:41]

**Sunny Dear:** I think it really, in the history here that my grandmother writes about, back in the thirties when they were doing it is when it was different, because they didn’t have fryers. They had kettles. They didn’t have big glazers that you just swiped the handle over and get all the donuts. They had bowls, so you would do two donuts at a time.

So things really changed from the thirties up till probably the fifties and sixties is when the equipment started becoming more user-friendly, I guess, what you want to call it. But it’s still the same today. You have a fryer that you can fry—I think it’s a couple dozen donuts, maybe three-dozen donuts at a time. You have a proof box where the

donuts are proofed. And back then, they didn't have proof boxes. They used what they called proof boards, and I don't know how that worked, if they just set the donuts out or if they—of course, they didn't have AC back then, so they had just open rooms like this, and that's a really good picture that dictates or depicts how it looked. No AC. You can imagine. Hardworking.

They were making their donut flour by hand, because they didn't have machines like they do nowadays that would blend it. So now you remember seeing the blender in the back that they put all the ingredients into. Actually, it's a ribbon blender and blends that up and has a bagger that actually you attach the bag. They didn't have that back then. My grandmother was cracking eggs open and separating the yolks from the whites.

[Laughter]

[00:12:33]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So you gave me a photograph here. Would you describe it and let me know its provenance? Where did it come from? When did you first see it?

[00:12:41]

**Sunny Dear:** It's in Dallas. It is probably down on Main Street, I believe. I don't think this was quite Ross Avenue yet. It could have been Second Avenue. Mainly back then they had donut routes, so they would make all these donuts and drivers, like my dad at the time, who was young, would load up those panel vans you've seen pictures of, and deliver, and that's how they sold most of the donuts back then, were wholesale, is what it

was. And that's actually how my grandfather got started. He was wholesaling donuts. It's all written here. I reread this this morning. It's very interesting.

[00:13:29]

**Sunny Dear:** So you mentioned probably most likely the Ross Avenue location with this photograph. So that would have been during World War II.

[00:13:37]

**Sunny Dear:** I think this was—I really don't know.

[00:13:44]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Around there.

[00:13:44]

**Sunny Dear:** Yeah. I think this is more like Second Avenue or Main Street, because I don't think—Ross Avenue was a little bit more in the fifties, so it actually had more of a storefront to it. This is the Ross Avenue store. So you can tell the difference in the type of time that you're dealing with here, no AC, that kind of situation. But then here the Ross Avenue picture that you have, this is more those times. So I'd say fifties is the Ross Avenue. That's up there.

And I actually do remember Mom pulling up at 9:00 o'clock at night to close the store up. These were neon lights right here. They're donuts, but they would blink like this

and drop down, and then do this. So I'd be sitting in the car watching the neon light do this until, you know, she was finished with whatever.

I don't know if you remember or if Lon brought up the *Dialing for Donuts* radio thing that they did to promote. That's another whole subject as well. It was called *Dialing for Donuts*.

[00:15:03]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Was it to benefit a local charity or nonprofit?

[00:15:05]

**Sunny Dear:** I don't know how they did—I think it was just like a grand opening type of a thing, is what they did, because this is Ross Avenue here. This is the location there. So probably just promoting. Here's a picture of the radio guy.

[00:15:30]

**Jaime Cantrell:** These are great photographs.

[00:15:32]

**Sunny Dear:** This may be the storefront to this location here, and this is why I wish my mom was here, because she knows this. And you can see “25 cents a dozen” on the donuts.

[00:15:45]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Wow. This handwritten account that you mentioned that you read this morning, can you summarize it for me or maybe read some excerpts of things that you want on the record? Tell me who wrote it and when.

[00:16:00]

**Sunny Dear:** This one is actually written by my grandmother.

[00:16:04]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Oh, my goodness. Rosalea?

[00:16:02]

**Sunny Dear:** Yes. They were married in 1925, and she just speaks about how they came from a middle-class family. J.B. started to run a donut route. Soon they had three routes. It goes on to say that their first store was in Houston, then Shreveport, Oklahoma.

They were making so many donuts, and they had big families back then, so some of their siblings ended up with donut shops, a lot of them, actually. They were making so many donuts back then, they were working so hard, that they decided that they needed to start making—because they were making the flour by hand, that they needed a place to do that, so that’s how they ended up doing the flour plant. She just talks about how it was so fantastic how “The Lord was with us as we both had good health and willing and able to work hard. J.B. went to work on the road selling and delivering donuts and donut flour.” Oh, that’s what they did after they started making the donut flour, that they would go out and sell the donut flour.

This was 1935. “We had grown so fast now at the donut flour shops and our flour business, we had to share some with others.” So they started putting all their family into business until we had all of our—they had stores in Beaumont, Nederland, Houston. They even went over to Rhode Island. That seems like there’s a store out there, is what they say.

It’s something that I will just have to copy. I can copy this typed one for you, and you can probably buzz through it and see what you think, but they had a fantastic thing. They worked very hard. They earned every penny that they made, and they were really generous about it, because they kept the family going, and that’s what I think of every time I come in to work, is look what they’ve left us, look what we’re able to have, to come to every day.

[00:18:36]

**Jaime Cantrell:** The stewardship.

[00:18:37]

**Sunny Dear:** Yes. We’re so fortunate to have been able to come to work every day, as where some other people haven’t had that opportunity. And this is only because my grandparents, my mom, my uncle, you know, they’ve left this legacy here. We’re lucky. We’re very fortunate.

[00:18:58]

[00:18:59]

**Sunny Dear:** So the typewritten account, is that also from your grandmother?

[00:19:02]

**Sunny Dear:** It's basically somebody took—what they did was they read this or they interviewed her, because I do remember that, and they took notes and they just came back. I think this was a lady that used to work here with us. So she typed this all up. This is actually on our website, I think.

[00:19:21]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Okay, in the “history” section.

[00:19:22]

**Sunny Dear:** Right. So I'll be happy to make a copy of it and you can take this with you and read through it. It's a little bit easier than this. This is okay, but it's just nice reading this because I see her sitting in her chair. She had broken her hip at one time, so she wasn't really mobile. So I see her sitting in her chair and writing this down. I know exactly—I can see her to the day doing that.

[00:19:47]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So you talk about the legacy. How does that manifest day-to-day for you? What is a typical day coming in look like, or what over a larger scale of time, like over a month, you know, what has to get done for the business to move forward?

[00:20:08]

**Sunny Dear:** Customer service, making sure that we produce, you know, our product and we do it well, the same way that it has always been done, because nothing's changed. The exact recipe that she put in place is still here today, it's still made the exact same way. Customer service, like I said, just making sure that our customers have the donut flour and everything that they need. Keeping this place going [laughter], just keeping it up.

We've been here since 1970. The exact same equipment is in place as was put in. After we moved in here in '70, it actually had a fire, so we were back out in '71, and what they did was there was a building right behind us on the next street over, and they moved enough equipment over there to blend donut flour until this place was [unclear], but this place was totally gutted. I remember coming in here. I was probably about eleven or twelve years old, or ten, and it was just water everywhere. It was unreal, what happened. So that was sort of a letdown, but you would never know it today.

[00:21:33]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So when you say the equipment, can you narrate what's behind that door in the back? We open the door. What do people not get to see?

[00:21:47]

**Sunny Dear:** You have ingredients, you have a lot of donut flour bags sitting on the floor. They're fifty-pound bags. They're on pallets. So there's fifty bags to a pallet. There's three pallets high. There's usually anywhere from 500 to 1,000 bags of premium

sitting back there, a couple hundred bags of Angel Food cake. The bulk bin that's sitting back there, that holds up to 80,000 pounds of bulk flour that we have ordered in every couple of weeks, we have that brought in. The blender, the [unclear] blender, the guys that will dump up the ingredients, mix those together, and then put it in the blender and then put it into bags, and then we ship it out on trucks. We do have an in-town delivery service as well for the stores that are still around here, so we go out and deliver them every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.

[00:22:55]

**Jaime Cantrell:** And it smells sweet.

[00:22:57]

**Sunny Dear:** That is probably the—you're going to get hints of vanilla back there because we have the vanilla that you put in the glaze. I would say it's the vanilla and the sugar, probably, that you smell. [Laughter] I'm immune to it, so I really don't smell it.

[Laughter]

[00:23:15]

**Jaime Cantrell:** The last time I was here, I remember when you opened the door, right away I was just—

[00:23:23]

**Sunny Dear:** The flour.

[00:23:24]

**Jaime Cantrell:** [Laughter] It was delicious!

[00:23:27]

**Sunny Dear:** As kids, we were always back there playing, so we had access to the forklifts, so we've been driving forklifts since before we were driving cars. I still, like this morning, I get here about a little after 7:00 just to get things started, and I have a delivery truck that's already backed up, so I'll go ahead and offload him. I'll help him get the pallet from the nose of the truck, push it forward, get it off with the forklift, that kind of thing.

But maybe it's the Angel Food cake that you're smelling back there, the one that makes the cake donuts.

[00:24:03]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Those are my favorite. I told Lon that the cake donuts are my favorite, which I think are actually the worst for you. [Laughter]

[00:24:09]

**Sunny Dear:** A little bit. Just ten more calories is all.

[00:24:12]

**Jaime Cantrell:** No one notices that. [Laughter]

[00:24:14]

**Sunny Dear:** That's before they put the glaze on it. I like any donut that is fresh. I'm sort of spoiled because I've made so many in the past, that I'm used to picking them off the glazer and eating what I want, and I'll still eat two or three to this day if I have the choice. If somebody walks in with donuts, I'm going to eat them. So. [Laughter]

[00:24:35]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So you mentioned some of the ingredients in the back. I'm wondering what product-receiving challenges have you had since the pandemic started.

[00:24:47]

**Sunny Dear:** Well, that's a big one.

[interruption]

[00:25:19]

**Sunny Dear:** Ever since COVID started, so many things have changed with the economy, the freight, the shipping, people being at home, not working. There's been a lot of things that you're just now noticing the chain reaction from what has happened. It has been hard to get some ingredients, things that you would normally just pick up the phone and call and order. They may tell you it's two weeks from now or it may be a month from now or they don't even have it anymore. Ever since we started using palm shortening

twenty years ago, palm shortening comes from Asia, so that has been really hard to get. It's also shot up in price extensively. I mean, for the customers, it's become very expensive.

All of this is supposed to, it looks like, or you're being told it's probably got another six or seven months to go, but now with this delta variant coming out, I don't know that that's even going to be—I think the forecast is going to be restructured in the end. So I'm just hoping that everybody stays normal, the kids are going back to school, you know. You just have to charge through this as much as we can. Staying home certainly isn't the answer. It certainly is not. So it's just unfortunately— [Laughter]

[00:26:54]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So besides, I guess, access issues with ingredients, how has the pandemic impacted either the company or employees or franchises or even your family?

[00:27:16]

**Sunny Dear:** We haven't seen that much change. There's been slow points here and there, but, obviously, it's because the donut shops are not selling as much, but it doesn't seem to last very long. Within a matter of weeks, it's like they're ordering again. I think they've just had periods where they're slower, but nobody has really gone out of business or closed up that I know of.

As far as our family goes, I feel very fortunate to be able to get up and come to work every day. My husband, on the other hand, he's working from home, trying to start a business, and I think I'm in the better half, being able to get up and come to work. I

thank my mom, my grandparents for setting this up, because food is one of those items that people are always going to eat food. So.

[00:28:15]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Well, I was in Shreveport recently and I saw Mike Jones. I had to wait in line because there were folks at the front of the store buying donuts. I made the mistake of going at 4:00. [Laughter] So that was right when they were hot and ready. So I almost left and came back because there was such a line of folks just—

[00:28:42]

**Sunny Dear:** That's awesome.

[00:28:42]

**Jaime Cantrell:** —on a regular Thursday, on a regular Monday, you know, getting their donuts.

[00:28:47]

**Sunny Dear:** We get so many calls here. Of course, I'm not over there. I think I've been there a couple of times in the past twenty years or so, so I've never really had the chance, the opportunity to see what you're talking about, but I get phone calls every week from people that have either relocated here or have been through there, they've grown up. I get people that just call me and say, "I grew up on Southern Maid. I love Southern Maid Donuts," and they talk about Shreveport. It's a big thing. So.

[00:29:26]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So I'm looking at a stack of photos here of Southern Maid's relationship to the *Louisiana Hayride*, which was produced at the Shreveport Municipal Auditorium, and so maybe walk me through some of these that we're looking at.

[00:29:46]

**Sunny Dear:** Well—

[00:29:48]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Where did they come from? What are we looking at?

[00:29:50]

**Sunny Dear:** Well, since I wasn't there, my mom was and my parents were, grandparents and so forth, I just remember them—that this was a very common thing that they would go to all the time. It was a really big thing. This is Elvis Presley. I remember hearing my mom talk about she met Elvis at one time, but nobody knew who he was back then. He was just getting started, so it wasn't like she knew him or knew very much about him.

This is Johnny Cash, I believe, and I don't know who the other gentleman is.

These are just photos that I've only seen most of my life, but I don't know much about them, but I do know that this photo here is Bruce Jones, and he is the gentleman that was friends with my grandparents, J.B. Hargrove, and he is the one that started the

area franchise over there in Shreveport, and he's responsible for all of the things that you hear about Southern Maid over in Louisiana.

My uncle told me just this morning, because he saw this picture sitting here, and he said that my mom just adored him, that he would come to town and they would just go out and get around and hang out. His wife, Dannie, I do remember meeting them.

Oh, gosh. Horace Logan, I know the name, but I just recognize the face, and some of these other people. These are musicians. I've heard some of the music because I have played some of the YouTube videos, looking for that famous jingle that everybody talks about. So I don't know very much about these photos, but I know that there's some pretty famous people here.

[00:31:44]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So how did the photographs come into y'all's possession?

[00:31:47]

**Sunny Dear:** Oh, since everybody was always over there all the time, I'm sure it was a firsthand thing. I'm sure that they just received them back then, because they've been here as long as I've been here. So these were just things that they obtained at the time, probably. I don't know. [Laughter]

[00:32:07]

**Sunny Dear:** So the last time I was here, you were sharing some of the more colorful stories of the Shreveport Southern Maid. You mentioned the talking birds, the mynah birds.

[00:32:19]

**Sunny Dear:** He was a very big—Bruce Jones was—you’ve heard this a million times—very big into animals. He *loved* animals, and supposedly they didn’t allow a zoo over there. Is that true? So he was going to make sure that all the kids got to see animals and so forth. I know he’s had elephants. You’ve probably done a story on that already. I just remember hearing the stories about the mynah birds being in the storefront, actually right out in the donut shop. Do you have pictures of that?

[00:32:53]

**Sunny Dear:** I do not, but I had heard stories from a number of folks in Shreveport who would have been kids at the time, remembering—

[00:33:03]

**Sunny Dear:** The birds. [Laughter]

[00:33:03]

**Jaime Cantrell:** —the birds. And I know that when I spoke with Mike, he mentioned how his father was responsible for what evolved into some sort of city ordinance [Laughter] around the regulation of—

[00:33:22]

**Sunny Dear:** I've heard that too.

[00:33:23]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Yeah. What did you hear?

[00:33:25]

**Sunny Dear:** The same thing, that because of him, they ended up having to have an ordinance about it. So.

[00:33:35]

**Jaime Cantrell:** I actually received an email from a woman by the name of Sandra Ginsberg [phonetic] because I put a call out on Facebook and I said, "If you have any memories of Southern Maid on the Greenwood location or the Hearne location, if you have a good story, I want to hear about it."

And Sandra emailed me, and I'm going to read it directly. "This occurred probably late summer or early fall 1951. Both my aunts were pregnant, both delivered in October and had gone to Southern Maid, and while there, someone whistled. My aunts were highly incensed until they realized it was the mynah bird caged in the store."

[laughter]

[00:34:22]

**Sunny Dear:** That's cute.

[00:34:23]

**Jaime Cantrell:** And that was an email I have from Sandra Ginsberg.

[00:34:26]

**Sunny Dear:** I wish my mom—again, like I said, I wish she were here, because she was there. She remembered—I remember her telling some stories, but nothing really stuck in my head. The box that they have, have you seen the donut box with the little dog on there? I believe the dog's name was Miss Mary?

[00:34:46]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Right. I got that story from Mike, yeah.

[00:34:50]

**Sunny Dear:** So he was very into his animals, and that's great. He seemed like a really dear, sweet man, and if my mom liked him, then he had to be very special.

[00:35:02]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So tell me about the next generation. Tell me about your daughter, because she works here too.

[00:35:08]

**Sunny Dear:** And now my brother Les, who is CEO, his son has come to work here recently since you were here last time. He's learning to make the donut flour. Rachael is learning—she's always learning how to make the donuts and so forth. She makes a really good donut. We've done some cake donuts here just a few months ago, and she did them all by herself. She did excellent. So there's a lot of learning to go. I mean, it'll be things that I don't even know. My brother, thank goodness, has learned a lot from Lon, because whenever we open up a donut shop, they both still go, so he's learned quite a bit, so he'll be passing down a lot of donut-making skills to them.

Just, like I said, the customer service, keeping that going, keeping that donut flour going, and keeping it perfect so that when they make the donut, it's still a Southern Maid donut. And you've been so Shreveport recently, so that's where the donut flour is coming from here, and they've done an excellent job. I hear more comments about them every single week, at least. Somebody's always calling. So.

[00:36:29]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So we talked about your daughter and how she's getting into the sort of family business, and you mentioned that your mother used to have distributors or drivers, you know, just call her to chat, you know.

[00:36:50]

**Sunny Dear:** Right.

[00:36:50]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Do you have any memories of long-loyal customers that you want to share, maybe just, you know, folks that have been either affiliated with y'all professionally on the business side or folks who have been donut lovers for generations and now their grandkids come?

[00:37:12]

**Sunny Dear:** Well, my Uncle Juan has several grandkids and he has great-grandchildren, so on their first birthday, they all get to go to a Southern Maid and eat their first donut when they're, what, one-plus-year-old, and they'll always take a picture and put it on Facebook.

We do have one customer that's been making Southern Maid donuts since I was a kid, and he's still in business, and that's the one in Plano. His name is Ron Beshara [phonetic], and he's still there. He and his wife still go in every single morning and make donuts.

[interruption]

[00:38:12]

**Sunny Dear:** So as far as people, everywhere I go, because sometimes I'll wear a Southern Maid shirt to work a couple times a week, and I'll go to Home Depot or I'll go to Walmart or wherever I happen to go, and people always stop me and say, "I *love* Southern Maid Donuts," and they'll tell me, "I remember the store in Casa Linda," or, "I remember the store in Plano," or, "I remember the store," or, "I'm from Shreveport." And

I do hear people all the time, and it's pretty amazing. I guess I've been hearing that all my life. [Laughter] So.

[00:38:51]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So I find it fascinating how so many different arms sort of interlace with Southern Maid, right? We have the generations of family members in the business, we have the generations of customers in the business, we have the generations of franchises in the business, you know, and from the sort of baking standpoint, from the actual making-of-the-product standpoint, what do you think is the secret to it all?

[00:39:31]

**Sunny Dear:** I'd have to say it's just—and I go back to my grandmother and my grandparents for coming up with the recipe that we've stuck with all this time, that we've done the same thing. We haven't changed or we haven't tried to make it this way or that way. We've just stuck to basics, and that's all I—I don't know what else to say.

[Laughter]

[00:39:31]

**Jaime Cantrell:** So are there any—not donut companies, but when we think about baking in the South, are there any other family-owned businesses in Dallas or even in the region that you associate with, you know, sort of growing up alongside Southern Maid?

[00:40:18]

**Sunny Dear:** El Fenix.

[00:40:20]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Okay. Tell me about that.

[00:40:20]

**Sunny Dear:** They were family-owned and -operated for many years up until just recently, I believe. A big conglomerate bought them out. I don't know if it was El Chico or who it was, but I remember going in there all the time growing up as a kid. There was one down on Griffin Street near downtown, and at that time, I worked for my dad in the downtown area. This was back in the nineties. I went over to go pick up some food for everybody for lunch, and I went in there, and while I was sitting in there waiting, the gentleman that owned the place, he came out to the front and was just kind of talking to me, said, "Hey, I've got something to show you."

So he took me back in his wherever it was, the office or whatever. He had some eight-by-ten glossies of Bonnie and Clyde after they had been shot and killed. [Laughter] So I thought that was pretty neat, because he just started showing me these eight-by-ten glossies like those. But that told me he's just so family oriented, that he would take the time of day to do something like that.

Lone Star Donuts, they've been around as long as we have. I grew up, my aunt lived next door to the owners, so I grew up knowing their daughters. I would go over there and swim with them or hang out with them. But they were doing the exact same thing, but we were all friends. Even their parents were friends with my grandparents and

so forth and so on. I even knew the owners up until just in the last fifteen years, the wife. I remember going over to their house for Thanksgiving just about ten, fifteen years ago.

So, Lone Star Donuts, El Fenix, Southern Maid.

[00:42:13]

**Jaime Cantrell:** El Fenix is a *huge* Dallas institution.

[00:42:16]

**Sunny Dear:** It is.

[00:42:16]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Even I know that from outside of Dallas.

[00:42:19]

**Sunny Dear:** You can imagine what it was like back then, because times were happy, people were doing well, nobody had—it was just, you know, everybody got up and went to work and enjoyed life every day. So that’s what I kind of miss about it. I was born in 1960, so at least I’m young enough to remember what that kind of times were back here, you know, and I remember what it looked like, I remember just getting around or whatever the case was. It was just a happier time, no self-serve gas stations. [laughter]

[00:43:00]

**Jaime Cantrell:** It's funny you mention that, because I think in New Jersey, gas station attendants are classified as a skilled profession, so you still can't pump your own gas in New Jersey because it's a career, you know, that gas station attendants still have in the state. I think I remember that the last time I traveled through, and I remember thinking, "Okay." [Laughter]

[00:43:24]

**Sunny Dear:** In New Jersey?

[00:43:24]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Yeah. Pump my gas. [Laughter]

[00:43:25]

**Sunny Dear:** Check the oil. And I miss that, because they would raise the hood and check the oil, fill the windshield wiper, wipe your windows down, you know, and bring the credit card thing out to you and run your credit card, and you'd just sit in your car the whole entire time. [Laughter] Fill up your tires, you know.

[00:43:45]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Things were so easy [Laughter], for sure, and it's funny how this ease-versus-hardness sort of comes in and out almost every day, it feels like.

[00:43:55]

**Sunny Dear:** Unfortunately, people don't—they don't know what hard work is, and that's what I love about the transcript here that my grandmother wrote, is she said they worked so hard, that they were selling so many donuts, that there were times where she was like, "Just please don't come in and buy any more donuts," because she was so tired. But they didn't have the equipment starting out like we do now. They were doing *everything* by hand, with no air conditioning. Can you imagine? We can't even drive down the street in our car without AC, and we're just like, "Oh!" you know. [Laughter]

[00:44:33]

**Jaime Cantrell:** I wonder what kind of toll that took on the body. I think about if I'm at home and I'm whisking eggs, you know, and I'm trying to make a meringue or something, and five minutes later, my arm is exhausted and it's still flat, there are no peaks. [Laughter] What must that have been like with the flour and by-hand ingredients?

[00:45:00]

**Sunny Dear:** Because they were mixing the doughs by hand, and I have done that before, because our mixer broke on a job that we were doing one time down at—it was actually in Beaumont, and the mixer broke, so I got to start mixing the doughs by hand, and it wasn't fun. I did two or three of them or something. Maybe it was four, five, six. I can't remember how many it was, but I was worn out. [Laughter] It was terrible.

So, yeah, I mean, all the hard work that they did, but they got up, they did it every single day. Nobody had to tell them to get up. And they made a successful business out of

it, and they were generous with it. They helped other family members get off into business and so forth. It's just good times. It's just nice people.

[00:45:52]

**Jaime Cantrell:** And a lot of these photographs, I mean, there's such a community sort of affect that you see. There's kids, you know, everybody's wearing a Southern Maid paper hat, you know.

[00:46:05]

**Sunny Dear:** And they look so excited to be at a donut shop getting donuts. [Laughter]

[00:46:09]

**Jaime Cantrell:** I'm sure, I'm sure. So is there anything that you wanted to share that maybe we didn't get to touch on or something else about Southern Maid Donuts that helps express its history before we come to an end?

[00:46:26]

**Sunny Dear:** Oh, my gosh. I feel like I've already said so much about how excited I am, still, to be here and just be associated with the name Southern Maid, and every time somebody stops me on the street, if I have a shirt on and they see it, I get to tell them, "Well, my grandparents started it in 1937," and they're like, "Wow!" It's amazing to be able—because there's not a lot of that left out there. How many people can say something like that? Just, you know, a family-owned business where I'm still getting to enjoy it

every day of my life, and now my daughter, my nephew. I can see them carrying it on just like we have.

[00:47:22]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Have y'all begun to think about the centennial?

[00:47:26]

**Sunny Dear:** No, because I still remember when it was the seventh-five mark when we—I think we had some t-shirts made or something like that. We did have some stickers made when it came to the eighty-year anniversary. But, no, I have not, so that needs to be dealt with. [Laughter]

[00:47:48]

**Jaime Cantrell:** You've got a decade and some change to plan.

[00:47:49]

**Sunny Dear:** It may take that long. [laughter]

[00:47:54]

**Jaime Cantrell:** Well, thank you so much for speaking with me today.

[00:47:55]

**Sunny Dear:** Sure!

[End of interview]