Robert Carriker

University of Louisiana at Lafayette - Lafayette, LA

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Phillip Norman Reid: All right. Today is April 5th, 2022. I'm here at University of Louisiana, Lafayette with Dr. Robert Carriker. Dr. Carriker, could you introduce yourself for the recorder?

Robert Carriker: Sure. Robert Carriker. The last name is spelled c-a-r-r-i-k-e-r.

Phillip Norman Reid: And what do you do?

Robert Carriker: I'm a history professor here at UL Lafayette, but I also have many other sort of interests and connections within the community. So I'm not exclusively occupied with history professor work. I find many other outlets for my talents and creativity.

Phillip Norman Reid: Awesome. I'm excited to talk about those. And just to start off, could you just tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your upbringing was like?

Robert Carriker: Yes. So I'm originally from Spokane, Washington, and my father was a history professor at Gonzaga University, which is where I went to undergraduate, in Spokane, Washington.

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And I have two brothers, an older brother and a younger brother, and my mother took care of making sure that we stayed on the straight and narrow as best she could. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Sure. What did that look like? What kind of values did your mom impart?

Robert Carriker: [Laughter] Watch what you say.

Phillip Norman Reid: What sort of discipline did she hand out?

Robert Carriker: Watch what you say.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: No, I grew up in a house that was very open to letting you do what you wanted to do and was not restrictive in any way. So encouraged to participate, encouraged to do well, but also encouraged to choose your own path and do what it is that interests you.

Phillip Norman Reid: And what was Spokane like when you were growing up there?

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Robert Carriker: So if you say you're from Washington State, say you're from Spokane, and then you say Washington State, and people default to thinking of Seattle, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: Because Seattle is the big urban core of Washington State.

Phillip Norman Reid: Sure.

Robert Carriker: But Spokane is on the complete opposite side of the state. It's in Eastern Washington and it is not Seattle in any way. It's not Seattle in it's gigantic urban sprawl and it's not Seattle with the rain. Spokane is not a rainy place. Spokane is very much a place that has four seasons. And it's grown a lot since I grew up there. I left in 1990-- oh, gosh [19]91 or [19]92 when I went off to graduate school. But it was a medium-sized place, and, again, those four seasons gave everybody an opportunity to experience life in four different ways constantly.

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And it was fun. It was a fun place to grow up. And it was just big enough to be useful and meaningful and just small enough that you felt like you were in your own sort of place, I think.

Phillip Norman Reid: Hmm. Do you think there's some parallels between what you appreciate about Spokane and Lafayette?

Robert Carriker: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I ended up in a community that's very similar in that respect, and similar also in the respect that if you say you're from Louisiana people default to thinking New Orleans.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And Lafayette is not New Orleans. It's about the same distance as Spokane was from Seattle, and it's about the same distance in difference, in how Lafayette is different from New Orleans. We're not as big, not as congested, and the culture is very much connected on a sort of neighborhood and community level.

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Phillip Norman Reid: That's awesome. And we'll get a little bit more into kind of this place, but I'm curious to hear more about when you were a kid. What did you like to do, having that openness of finding your own path? What were you drawn to?

Robert Carriker: [Laughter] We lived right next to a state park, so I spent a lot of time in the state park and hiking around. There's a major river that flows through Spokane and I just had to go down a giant bluff to get to that river. And I had the entire unsafe river at my disposal.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: So we did lots of things that you probably hope your kids won't be doing because they're inherently unsafe, but we had the freedom to go off and do that. I'm sure that people didn't necessarily know that we were wading across rivers that we shouldn't have been wading across and things of that nature.

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Phillip Norman Reid: That could've gone bad.

Robert Carriker: [Laughter] Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: Glad you're still here. [Laughter] Is that the Snake River?

Robert Carriker: No, it's the Spokane River.

Phillip Norman Reid: The Spokane River. Okay. Gotcha.

Robert Carriker: Yeah. It flows into the Columbia River that then is the major river of the Pacific Northwest.

Phillip Norman Reid: Gotcha. And in terms of the interest in history, was that there from an early age or where did that come from?

Robert Carriker: So my father was/is the best history professor that a person could ever have. I mean, he-- unbelievable. His range and depth of knowledge on everything around him. Sometimes on road trips I would just intentionally say, "So that barn over there, what can you tell me about that?" And I did it because, miraculously, somehow, he would be able to tell something about that barn, whether it was the architectural style that that barn was in or whether it was the first settlers that came into that region to start growing wheat, or whatever it was.

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So he was really, really good. And so I have this natural appreciation for history because, throughout my whole life history, through him, is what sort of made everything come alive. Everything was related to it in a really fun and just ever-present way. So obviously that connection led me down the path of history, as well, because that's what I enjoyed and that's what I was sort of drawn to.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Had some really positive associations with.

Robert Carriker: Yeah. Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: What about, growing up, your relationship with cooking, baking, and food? What was that like?

Robert Carriker: So it's funny because I wasn't really cooking, myself, at all. And our family wasn't uniquely connected to food, though maybe in some ways.

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But here's the thing, in my family we had jobs when we would go on road trips specifically, and so my younger brother's job was he had the family change purse and all of our-- this sounds incredible, but all of our resources, our entertainment resources, monetary, were in that change purse. And he was the responsibility of deciding whether or not we would spend some of that money on a particular entertainment excursion. So his job was he managed the magic change purse. My older brother's job, as best I can recall, was to punch me in the face if I incurred into his space, 'cause I don't remember otherwise what he was doing, but I do remember he did that very frequently, though I'm sure he had another particular job.

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I should probably call my dad and ask him what his job was.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: But my job was I was considered the food chairman. That was my official title. I was the food chairman, and as the food chairman it was my responsibility to decide where we would go for our meals. And the way they did this, we actually had power and I would make the determination. So restaurants would be put on the table. It was, like, okay, we could go here, we could go there, we could go here. "All right, Bob. You're the food chairman. What are we doin'?" And then I would make the call. And then, the other thing that we would always do was, at the end of our meals, we would always rate the restaurant, just among the five of us, my mom, my dad, my two brothers, and I.

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And so what review, what rating would you give that? One out of ten, with ten being the highest, what would it be? And if my other family members were here, they would relay to you that the dynamic of this was that they were brutal and unforgiving, and I was always the person who said, "Well, you know, I mean, I'm sure that that chef has a family at home that he probably needs to support. And you don't know what stresses and strain he's under. I don't think that's fair that you gave him a seven. I think a nine is good."

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: So I was always the sympathetic one in the family who was always more giving than everybody else, it seemed. They were always just hardcore wanting to drop the hammer. Now, this didn't mean anything, right, 'cause it's just us in the station wagon driving back to the hotel or whatever it was.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. [Laughter]

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Robert Carriker: So absolutely, definitely, I had this food authority position and this reviewing tendency that was given to me. There's no doubt. I started to develop my own sort of interest in food when I went to Italy for my junior year abroad. And it sorta makes sense. I was in that experience to embrace it on all levels and obviously food is one of the major levels to engage with a culture anywhere. And so I absolutely made a point of doing that, and that's when it started for me. That's when I started to really sort of embrace and go out to intentionally participate in food as a cultural community marker.

Phillip Norman Reid: Cool. And what are some of your memories from that experience in Italy?

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Robert Carriker: I mean, it was everywhere. The program, it was in Italy, but we traveled to Turkey.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, wow.

Robert Carriker: Yeah. So we went to Spain, we went all over the place. And what I would do is I would go and find the foods to eat, and I made a point of doing that. And I was different with my classmates, they were interested in doing other things, but for me it was always, no, I want to try that bratwurst. And, oh, my God, they sell three bratwursts. I'm gonna get all three of those! I want to try all of those.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: And then, as we're walking down the street in Turkey, and I come across a shop that sells baklava. Like, oh, my gosh, I'm in Turkey and there are baklava right here! And so then I would get four or five or six of them to sample it all. So it was everywhere. And in Italy, of course, I was being exposed to new pastas and cooking, and just embraced it all.

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Phillip Norman Reid: You had these travels where you got to try food. Was there any particular regional cuisine in Spokane?

Robert Carriker: [Laughter] Of course, we laugh, ha, ha, regional cuisine in Spokane? Oh, my God. No. No. It's funny because one of Washington State's greatest culinary contributions is-- and I'm really not making this up-- it's called Aplets & Cotlets. And you can go ahead and look it up, Aplets & Cotlets, and it's a candy. And it's a jelly candy. And the flavors are apple-- it's an apple jelly candy-- and Cotlets is apricots. Aplets & Cotlets. And they're these jelly candies that are in squares and they have powdered sugar on them. I think they might have nuts in them. They're fine, I guess. They're not distasteful but it's pretty mundane stuff.

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And that sort of encapsulates the actual culinary world that I lived in, which was, if Aplets & Cotlets were at the top of the list, that pretty much gives you an idea.

Phillip Norman Reid: You were a blank slate.

Robert Carriker: Right. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: That sounds like Turkish Delight maybe?

Robert Carriker: Yeah, it is essentially Turkish Delight. I only recently even came to realize what Turkish Delight was. And when I was watching what Turkish Delight was, I thought, oh, that's Aplets & Cotlets! [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. That's so interesting.

Robert Carriker: And that may have been great in the 1400s but, you know what . . . ?

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Other things have come along, yeah.

Robert Carriker: Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's funny. I didn't know that. I told you last time that my dad's side is from Eastern Washington, but we never had Aplets & Cotlets.

Robert Carriker: No, I didn't know that. You didn't mention that.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. Walla Walla.

Robert Carriker: Oh, yeah. No, you did. Yeah, yeah, yeah, right.

Phillip Norman Reid: My grandfather went to Whitman.

Robert Carriker: We would call that Central Washington. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, yeah. I get it mixed up. 'Cause how far is Spokane from Walla Walla?

Robert Carriker: From Walla Walla? I mean, really Walla Walla is in Central Washington. Yeah, it's two hours away.

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Phillip Norman Reid: Okay. Right. Gotcha. Central Washington. Well, yeah, so junior year abroad undergrad, going to Italy, and then how did your trajectory through history and academia kind of develop after that?

Robert Carriker: Well, so I was graduating from Gonzaga University with a bachelor's degree in history, and the question is, all right, now what? And law school was clearly a path that many of my colleagues at that point were taking. And it was certainly considered, but I liked history and so my father was aware of sort of an up and coming, emerging aspect of history which was public history. Essentially, using history outside of the classroom. The default assumption always had been, still kind of always is, oh, so you're getting a degree in history? So where are you going to teach?

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And public history recognized that there are all sorts of outlets for people to be practicing history outside of a strict classroom setting, and so public history taught people how to do that and how to go about doing it in museums and in historic preservation and in business applications of history and in oral history. And the list goes on and on and on. And so I thought that my best path would be to probably do history in the park service, either be a National Park Service ranger or work in the Forest Service doing history. And so I went to graduate school in public history with the intention of doing that, and it went well. And so I continued on and got a PhD in history.

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And as I went into the PhD program, the director of our program who had established-- he was one of the first people to be doing public history and he had been training people with master's degrees and the expectation was public history master's degree was the terminal degree and you

would go out and start practicing. And then there were a group of us who started to say, well, we want to continue on for a PhD and we want to continue to utilize public history within that training, and so how can we do that? And he thought, okay, well, how do we do that? And so he sort of started to develop a PhD track in public history to teach us how to do it at the higher level, and specifically teach us how to teach public history and how to establish public history programs. And so that was at Arizona State University and that was Noel Stowe who was doing that. And then I got a job in Louisiana actually doing it because the University of Louisiana, Lafayette-- the University of Southwestern Louisiana at the time-- wanted to establish a public history program, and so I was one of the people who had been trained to actually do that.

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And I came here in 1997, I guess. Yeah.

Phillip Norman Reid: Okay. Gotcha. Well, talk a little bit about why this idea of doing history outside of a strict classroom setting was interesting to you.

Robert Carriker: Interesting to me-- I mean, it's interesting in every respect.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: In some ways history as practiced in the academy is sort of oppressive and being out and interacting with people is dynamic and fun and ever changing, and requires skills that are not traditionally part of the historian's repertoire, right?

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Usually the historian, their job is very much-- they're a one-person show. They're responsible for their own research and they pull their hair out over years or decades going through archives. And

it's sort of a solitary endeavor other than when they're in the classroom. But public history is so much more open and wide and dynamic that it's an interesting place to be practicing history.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. And it sounds like those family road trips were like public history exercises.

Robert Carriker: They were, yeah. Right. Absolutely. We were going to all the museums and all the historic sites. And my father was always very active with historical societies and commissions and things, so he was always part of the board that was setting up the museum or setting up the historic site. And so he was doing public history before it was an identified avenue.

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He was very much a person who also was practicing history outside of the academy.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Kind of modeled that.

Robert Carriker: Yeah.

Phillip Norman Reid: So then University of Southeastern Louisiana, why were they interested in starting a public history program?

Robert Carriker: Well, they were interested at the same time that a lot of programs were interested, and that was the jobs in history in academia were few and far between, but people still wanted to have history degrees, and the question was, well, what can we do with history? And everybody would also say, well, you could do this, and you could this, and you could do this, and you could do this. But then the students might say, okay, do you have a program that will teach me to do that? And the master's programs would say, well, no, but you could do that. And then,

master's programs at various universities across the country started to say, okay, I guess maybe we need to get on board and actually hire somebody to do this.

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Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And in some universities they just said, well, who can do that? Who here can do that? Can somebody take this on? Can we do this? And they said, yeah, yeah, we can certainly do that. And then, other programs, other universities said, no, let's actually hire somebody who's dedicated to this, whose training is in this and isn't just sort of playing make-do. And so here at this university they were in tune enough to know that they should probably hire somebody who had the training to do it.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. And then, what have you liked about working with students in public history in particular?

Robert Carriker: Oh, I mean, working with students is just fun. That's the upside to working in academia, I think, because they're new and they've got new ideas and they challenge you and they're energetic and all of it.

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So working with students is just good, whether it's in public history specifically or in a US history survey class, it keeps things fresh, and you feel connected to people.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. And I saw from your website that you are able, or have in the past, been able to do some of these experiential-learning-type trips with students.

Robert Carriker: Right. Yeah. One of the things I established-- that would be an oral history project unto itself to record the-- so I started a program called History on the Move where I wanted to take students out to see where history happened. And so we started three-week summer study travel programs that were history centered. And yeah, we'd get in a van with ten to fifteen students and drive for three weeks through the American Southwest going to historic sites.

Phillip Norman Reid: Wow.

Robert Carriker: And then we did it up the Pacific Coast and to Alaska. We went to Alaska. And we did the American South, and we did the American West. Yeah.

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Phillip Norman Reid: Really cool. Well, let's get a little into-- you mentioned earlier that Lafayette was kind of appealingly similar to where you grew up in some ways. So just when you first got here what were your impressions? What did you like about it?

Robert Carriker: So when I first got here what I liked about it was just how friendly everyone was, and the real sense of community that people exhibited. When I moved into the neighborhood that I moved into, the first day four neighbors came walking across the street to meet us and welcome us to the neighborhood. So you weren't just some people who moved in and, who are those people? But they wanted to make you a part of their community. And so that really kind of embodies the spirit of Lafayette, is that's still what it's very much all about.

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Phillip Norman Reid: Right. And you were telling me last time that when you first got here all people talked about was boudin, so talk about [inaudible 0:23:10].

Robert Carriker: Well, yeah, it was food, and it was boudin. And so, right, people assume that they'll have to know what boudin is. I know there's a whole oral history project on boudin itself so they can go there and find out more than they ever need to know. Right. So yeah, boudin in South Louisiana, it's this sausage, rice and pork, and you eat it out of the casing. And people love it, and people have a favorite place where they get it from. Particular meat markets have their own little unique twist on the recipe and so much so that everybody feels like the place that they get it from is the best.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And so I came into the history department and in other places in the history department or in the departmental office somebody might bring in donuts every Thursday or something like this, right?

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Or scones, or a fruit tray or something like this. But in South Louisiana the way that they were doing it here-- and really it was because of the administrative assistant that we had. She was very local. She grew up, born, raised, hardcore Cajun person, and so she didn't bring donuts and she didn't bring scones, she brought boudin. She brought a box of warm sausage to the office every week or so, and everyone then-- obviously, it would smell delicious, and people would then say, “Oh, good, Sheila [sp] brought the boudin.” And people would gather in the lunchroom-- not at lunch but in the morning-- and they would grab their coffee and they would talk, and they would eat a link of boudin.

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They would eat some sausage in the morning. And so I was the new person, and everybody was interested and eager in introducing me to this place that I lived. So they said, oh, well, you gotta try the boudin. So I would eat the boudin. And the conversation always was, oh, yeah, well, if you think this is good boudin, you need to try it from this other place.

Phillip Norman Reid: Um-hm. Right.

Robert Carriker: And somebody would say, no, no, no, the best place is this place. And they would talk about another place. Well, I was here. My wife and I had moved to South Louisiana. We had no connection to the place whatsoever, but we wanted to find out about where we lived. And I like food. Everybody likes food.

Phillip Norman Reid: Sure.

Robert Carriker: And I liked this boudin that everybody was talking about and introducing me to.

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And so I started to say, "Okay, well, you know what we could do this weekend, you know what we could do on Saturday? We could go-- everybody said that Billy's has the best boudin." "Well, where is that?" "I don't know. It's somewhere-- it's up in Opelousas." "All right. Well, let's go find that." Now, this was before it was as easy as it is now to find everything online. So we had to figure out, all right, where is this place that they're talking about? We had to use the phonebook in some instances. And we would find it and then drive there and try it. And so now, when I came back that week at work, Sheila would bring in the boudin and she always brought in

the boudin from The Best Stop. And the reason she brought it in from The Best Stop, which is a particular meat market that makes it, is because it was right down the street from her house, so it made sense. She would stop on the way in, buy that, bring it in.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: Well, and now when the conversation turned to oh, this is good boudin, but, you know, you gotta try this other place, I would be able to say, "Well, you know what?

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Yeah, I tried Billy's and you're right, I agree, that is good stuff." And what I quickly started to realize was that nobody else was going out and trying it from any other place, so everybody had their favorite link of boudin, but it was their favorite link of boudin because it was the one that was closest to where they lived and that's what they would get. And I quickly started to recognize that, they're not going out and trying it from this place and this place and this place and this place. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah.

Robert Carriker: And that gave me the idea that maybe I could be the person that could actually write down my feelings on it. 'Cause everybody likes to talk about it. Everybody is sharing their feelings on it and they're essentially rating and reviewing it just like I did with my family back in the day after we would eat at the restaurant. This is what was happening.

Phillip Norman Reid: Totally.

Robert Carriker: And I thought, well, maybe I could be the one to actually write it down and make a website and put this out there, because everybody is really interested in it so they would be interested in this, and this could be a fun, creative thing for me to do.

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Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And so that's what I started to do, and that was, I think, around 2003 that we put the website together and then revealed it to the world in 2004. And it took off because people loved it and they loved the idea that somebody was reviewing it, and they loved the idea that they could disagree with what that person was saying and they could love the idea that they appreciated what this person-- that I was saying about the boudin, all of it.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Sure. You just kinda put that debate online.

Robert Carriker: Yeah. Put the debate online and put myself as the arbiter, that I was the one that gave the actual grade to these things. And that's what I did, and it was wonderful because there was a lot of outcry of, who does this person think he is? He's from Washington State!

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: And eventually I was able to start saying, "Yeah. Well, I've sampled seventy different links. How many have you sampled?"

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And they'd say, "Uh, three." [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: A good bit more, yeah. [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: Yeah. I'd say, "Well, you know what? I do know more than you do about this."

Phillip Norman Reid: That's interesting 'cause I feel like that's a good-- yeah, it upsets the local versus outsider trope.

Robert Carriker: Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: But I think outsiders can contribute in that way a lot of times. Even this project with king cake, I'm not from Louisiana, but when you come here and it's, like, oh, this is something new that everyone talks about, I want to experience so I can talk about it too.

Robert Carriker: Right. You come with a different perspective on things. Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Super interesting. So talk a little bit, just another Cajun staple, cracklin, and when you were exposed to that.

Robert Carriker: Oh, you know what? I don't want to get in-- but I was actually exposed to boudin during the job interview when I was here.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Robert Carriker: And then, yes, cracklin is this other pork product, this other meat product that people are also devoted to but not as deeply-- they love it, but they're not as devoted to it as deeply as they are to boudin.

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And the conversations don't swirl around cracklin the same way that they do-- but, of course, cracklin is deep fried pigskin with meat attached.

Phillip Norman Reid: Um-hm.

Robert Carriker: And you know what? I'm sure that I just ended up getting cracklin when I was out and about on one of my boudin runs, but I don't specifically remember when it started. I sort of always have shied away from cracklin only because I feel like it's-- the health consequences of it are so blatantly damaging that I can't even ignore it.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Right.

Robert Carriker: And so whenever I eat cracklin-- and obviously, it's delicious.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah.

Robert Carriker: But it's like eating bacon out of a bag, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: To the extreme.

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And we all know that that's a bad decision to be making for our long-term health.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: So I love cracklin, but I definitely try to hold that in moderation.

Phillip Norman Reid: Is it right to compare it to pork belly or is also not totally [inaudible 0:31:20]?

Robert Carriker: Well, I think it is. I think it is pork belly, yeah, but cut up into cubes and then deep fried.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Beautiful. [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: Right!

Phillip Norman Reid: And as a history professor have you looked into at all the history of these two staples and how they came to be and why they're significant in this region?

Robert Carriker: Of boudin and--

Phillip Norman Reid: Boudin and cracklin.

Robert Carriker: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I've written a book on boudin.

Phillip Norman Reid: Okay. Yeah. Well, give us the synopsis.

Robert Carriker: And I've written some articles on cracklin as well.

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And so, gosh, the synopsis is-- so there's a French connection here to Louisiana obviously, the Acadians and French culture. And in France, there's a sausage known as boudin, boudin blanc and boudin rouge. And they would use pork, but they would also use veal, and they would use chicken. So boudin in France is different but they had boudin and they had two different versions of it, white and red. And then, when people came to Louisiana as a colony and as a territory, they brought their food traditions with them and that included making sausages, as people around the world make sausages, and people around the world make sausages and they use fillers to extend those sausages out.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

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Robert Carriker: And in this region rice became the filler to extend that sausage out. And the recipes changed because the products changed, and the landscape changed, and the influences changed. Native American influences come onboard and Caribbean, African influences come onboard. And so the product then changes as a result of the landscape in which it's made in, but it still maintains that sort of French connection and is called boudin. And so it comes from that historical connection.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. And something I was wondering about, too, is, like, in terms of class, boudin strikes me as something that's, like so much cuisine, it initially developed as this food of kind of poverty, trying to make--

Robert Carriker: Make do, right.

Phillip Norman Reid: -- meat out of the excess parts of the meat that no one else wanted, kind of thing.

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Is that accurate or is the development different than that?

Robert Carriker: No, that is accurate. And actually there's kind of two versions of boudin, and the original version was a sophisticated thing, and it was kind of high end. And then, yeah, as it translated and transferred here it became a product made from the boucheries, and these were the communal butcherings of hogs where people would get together to butcher a hog, portion out the products to everybody in the family or in the neighborhood who was butchering the hog. Because if you butchered a hog, it was more meat that you could, as a family, manage, and so you did this as a community and then everybody would take a little bit. And then you would come back in a week or in two weeks and do it again.

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And boudin was one of the products that they would make from that communal hog butchering, the boucheries. And it was being used as a way to-- as sausage frequently is-- to make use of some of the things that don't otherwise stand on their own, the parts and the pieces. And then you could extend it out even further if you included rice, which was part of the agricultural staple of the region, as well.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. And was cracklin an outgrowth of those boucheries, too?

Robert Carriker: And cracklin as well, right. Yeah. 'Cause you've got the skin. What are you gonna do with the skin? Well, you're not gonna cut it up and put it on the grill, but if you cut it up and then fry it, because the skin has fat underneath it, that's pretty good stuff.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, right.

Robert Carriker: Yeah. So the cracklin and the boudin came out of those boucherie traditions for sure.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's really interesting.

0:36:00

Last thing on just kind of boudin in general, and we spoke about this last time, but I'd like to capture it, boudin's kind of designation as one of the most uncorrupted regional cuisines.

Robert Carriker: Oh, right.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. Talk about what that means.

Robert Carriker: Right. And it's true still to this day. I've referred to it as boudin being uniquely uncorrupted in the sense that it doesn't really exist much beyond the geographic region in which it began. And that geographic region includes East Texas for sure, but the reason that it includes East Texas is because there's part of the Cajun story and the Acadian story is expansion into this region, and that included East Texas, as well as South Louisiana.

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It doesn't exist much further north than Alexandria, Louisiana, because that wasn't the original Acadian region. It doesn't extend beyond Baton Rouge because, again, that was the extent of it. Now, you can find it all over the place, and there are restaurants that are Louisiana restaurants in Portland, Oregon, or in Washington, D.C. that are-- they're tuned in to the uniqueness of Louisiana's culinary traditions, and they're tuned in to, then, that boudin is one of those things. And so they'll make it and they'll put it on their menu, but it's an appetizer or something like this. But it doesn't exist anywhere outside of this region the way that it exists within this region. And it could.

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There's no reason that somebody can't make boudin in Boise, Idaho just as good as somebody makes it in Ville Platte, but the culture there won't embrace it and so it won't ever become what it is here.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. It hasn't pervaded in the way that, like, tacos have where you have, like, gentrified tacos, basically.

Robert Carriker: Exactly. Or barbecue, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: Or pizza. That goes anywhere and everywhere. But this one has stayed very much regionally connected. And it's not just this regional oddity, it's everywhere. It's everything. There are billboards all over the place for it, but nowhere else.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, really distinctive. And you mentioned something that makes me want to capture one more aspect of the regional history, just to be clear. So people having the boucheries were the Acadians, right? So talk about who the Acadians were and that type--

0:39:02

Robert Carriker: Yeah. And it gets complicated, but the Acadians were French people who had been exiled out of Nova Scotia by the British, and they had been kicked out of Nova Scotia for political and religious reasons and then they had to find a new place to go, and they found themselves being welcomed into French Louisiana. And they came here with very little, and they had to start making a new life for themselves in a landscape that can be somewhat unforgiving and somewhat brutal. I mean, the summers, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And the rains and the hurricanes and the bayous and all of it. It's difficult. And they were hearty people, and they were people who made the best of the situation that they had. And they sort of populated this region in different ways.

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But then, there are other people that were here also. There were Native American tribes, and those Acadian people, those Cajun people had to negotiate with the people who were already

living here, and they did that. And their traditions merged with those in some ways. And then, there were African communities that were here, and those people had their own traditions and food cultures. And everybody was here together and separate and together and separate. And there was intermingling, and you come up with some unique traditions.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. I mean, people say that about a lot of the cuisine of Louisiana, is just there was such a cultural richness for so long and so varied.

Robert Carriker: Right, for so long. And with boudin, we default to the Acadian component to it, but it's also connected to German immigrants here.

0:41:02

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And the Germans have long traditions of sausage making, and the Germans actually became the rice farmers in this region, and also had sausage-making traditions. And the Acadians did, and these people start working together and the Germans bring some sausage knowledge and some rice knowledge, and some rice, and it all comes together.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. But, yeah, I wanted to get the historical context so we can introduce the revelation of the boudin and cracklin king cake. [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: Right. The real reason that we're here. The invention. I have a colleague that says, "You know, you didn't really invent something. It has more of an industrial sensibility to it to invent something, doesn't it?" And I'm thinking, oh, come on. Just go with it.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Right.

Robert Carriker: So I created the boudin king cake, or invented it, whatever we want to say.

Phillip Norman Reid: Sure. So where, when, and why?

0:42:02

When did that happen?

Robert Carriker: Okay. So I guess it was 2015. Yeah, I think it was 2015. And so I had my boudin-reviewing website, and I had established, also, a cracklin-reviewing website. And I had also established a king-cake-reviewing website because I was having fun with my food world. Okay?

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And one of the things that you like to see when you have food reviewing websites is you like to see people going and using those websites, and you like to see that it's useful and that people are paying attention to it.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And so one of the ways that you draw attention to it is through social media postings because you can say to people, oh, look what's on the website. You should go look at it. And one of the things I was doing, I was having fun making my own recipes, my own boudin recipes, and I would-- again, 'cause I'm having fun with food, and there is an outlet for me to put my fun online.

0:43:09

Phillip Norman Reid: Um-hm.

Robert Carriker: And so I would make recipes with boudin, and I would photograph that and then I would put that on the website. And then I would draw people's attention to it, and they

would go, and they would enjoy it, and it was great. And so we were into Mardi Gras season of 2015, and I had an idea, okay, I need to do something. I need to keep it fresh; need to draw some new attention into this. So, oh, you know what? I think I could make a boudin king cake and put cracklin on it. Oh, my gosh! This is great! This is all three of my food worlds, it's boudin, it's king cake, and it's cracklin, and it makes sense. And so, yes, I will do that. And so I did that.

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And I went to the store, and I bought a bread mix and I bought boudin and I bought Steen's cane syrup, which is a sweet, pure cane syrup, for it, and I bought some cracklin crumbs. Some of the meat markets will sell the crumbs. After they've made the cracklin, they've fried the cracklin up in the pot, bits and pieces fall off, and then that becomes the cracklin crumbs. And they would actually sell that as a separate item because people would frequently put that into cornbread and make cracklin crumb cornbread.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, okay.

Robert Carriker: Okay. So I figured, all right, I could dust some cracklin crumbs on the top. This will really have some potential to start a conversation is what I figured.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, yeah.

Robert Carriker: And so I made it, and I had never made bread before in my life. I did it solely for the experience. And it came out very well.

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It looked really good. It was braided. I did two long sections of bread that was stuffed with boudin, and then I braided those. I braided 'em and then I formed it into a circle and brushed it

with an egg wash, 'cause I knew enough to do that. I know to brush it with an egg wash so that it will become rich and golden brown and shiny on the top. So I did that. And then, when it came out, I put the cracklin on the top of it and I drizzled the Steen's cane syrup on it, and I took pictures of it, and I cut it, and we ate it, and we thought it was great and it was wonderful. And then I said, all right, I'm gonna go off and I'm gonna post those pictures now. So that's what I did. The whole motivation behind it was just to do something curious. And it worked. People were interested in it. And then I started to realize they're much more interested in this than the boudin pizza that I made before.

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And they're more interested in this than the boudin pancakes that I had made before. And they're more interested in this than the triple boudin stuffed peppers that I have made before. So I've done this stuff before, these sort of odd ideas--

Phillip Norman Reid: Experiments, yeah.

Robert Carriker: -- and food experiments put to reality and then posted. And people appreciated all of them, but this one they were appreciating even more. And it caught the eye of a local news reporter, Megan Wyatt, food reporter-- more than just food. She worked at the time for *The Daily Advertiser*. And so she called me up, or messaged me and said, "Hey, I saw that boudin king cake thing that you made. That's really cool! I love that! Can I do an interview with you on it?" And so, of course, the answer is yes. If the reporter calls you and says I want to do a story on something you've done you don't say, well, check back with me in a month. No. You say, yeah, I'll do that. Let's do that tomorrow. When do you want to do it?

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So we did a phone interview about it, and at the end of the phone interview she said, "And so where would someone go to get one of these boudin cracklin king cakes if they wanted one?" And the honest answer was, I don't know. I guess they would just have to make it themselves. That would be what I should've said. But I had a moment of thinking-- part of why I end up doing so many fun things is because I always think, oh, yeah, I should do that. And it's not always a great idea, but I always think, oh, I should do this.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: And so I thought, you know what? I could make these for people if they wanted them. So I said, "Well, they can contact me, and I can make them for them." If I was thinking-- and I can't say I was actually thinking at that moment-- but if I was thinking at that moment I would've thought, oh, yeah. Maybe five or ten people in Lafayette might be interested in this.

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And that could be fun that I would make them for them. That would be a good story and that would be something exciting to do. So that's maybe what I was thinking. And so I said, "Yeah, they can contact me." So then, of course, at the end of the day, my wife comes home, and I say, "Oh, yeah. By the way, I might be making boudin king cakes. We'll see how things turn out."

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: And she says, "Okay. Whatever." And so the story ran in the newspaper, and it picked up steam. It became a viral story. It literally went-- well, as these things go, of course, it goes around the world, but to put it into context, it is still today, I believe, *The Daily Advertiser's*-- this local paper-- *The Daily Advertiser's* number one shared story of all time.

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Phillip Norman Reid: Wow.

Robert Carriker: Had more views than any other story that they've ever done. And that gives you an idea that it went everywhere. People--

Phillip Norman Reid: Crazy.

Robert Carriker: It was this moment and they saw it and they loved it and they shared it and they were talking about it. And so I then started to get inquiries. I'd given my email address; if you want one, to contact me. And so in the morning I opened up my email and, oh, look! Oh, yeah, people are liking this story. And somebody wants a boudin king cake. And I said, "Yeah, I can do that." "Well, how much is it?" I hadn't even thought about that. "Uh, thirty-five dollars." "Okay. Yeah. Well, I'd like this." Well, one order turned into four orders, turned into six orders. And at that point I quickly realized I can't do this. Realistically I could have made probably ten of these things, right?

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I mean, I have a kitchen in my house.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Right.

Robert Carriker: I don't have anything to actually meaningfully make food for people on any scale. But the orders were coming in. And initially my plan was for the first few people, yeah, I'll do that, because they were local orders. But then it started to get more than I could handle, and more than I could handle. So I thought to myself, well, I gotta stop this. I gotta call these people off. And I had this regular sort of back-and-forth email with people where I started to raise the

price. 'Cause, again, I never think that I should not do it. I always think I-- yeah, I need to do it. And I'm thinking, okay, I see this demand out there. I can't possibly meet it, so I need to raise the price to make it more manageable, to scare people away.

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And if somebody really wants it, I'll make it worth my while. So I started to raise the price. Initially, I thought I would do thirty-five dollars. And then I'd bring it up to seventy dollars. And people would say-- and this happened time and time again-- they would say, "Seventy dollars? That's outrageous! Who do you think you are? It seems like you're gouging." And I would write back, and I'd say, "I agree. I understand. I wouldn't do this if I were you. It is too much, but this is the way that it is right now." And they would say, "Well, that's outrageous. I just can't believe you're doing that. It's wrong. So I'll take five, and I need them in Los Angeles by Tuesday."

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Right.

Robert Carriker: I actually raised the price, theoretically, to a hundred and twenty-five dollars--

Phillip Norman Reid: Wow!

Robert Carriker: -- and no one said-- they all complained, and I was sympathetic to their complaints, but they all ultimately said, "Okay. Well, I need two," or, "Oh, I need ten."

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It didn't actually matter. It wouldn't have mattered if somebody was paying me five hundred dollars, I couldn't have made hundreds of these things.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: Not physically possible. So I realize, okay, I've created a disaster for myself, but I still think there's gotta be a way. [Laughter] Part of the reason why I ended up driving around the country with thirteen students in a van going from historic site to historic sites is because I always think, no, I can make it work. If I was smart at the very beginning, I would say, God, no way. This is insane. But I never do that. So I was about to shut down the boudin cracklin king cake website, but I thought, nah, you know what? Maybe. I can't do it, but somebody else can.

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I mean, people make baked goods, and they sell them, and maybe somebody else can do this. I had a friend, a colleague, his wife was starting a sort of catering business and she loved baking. Baking was her strength. And so I thought, well, maybe this is a great opportunity for her, 'cause this is what she wants to be doing. So I contacted her, and I say, "Hey, Amy, [sp] this is what's goin' on. Do you want to do this?" She was smart enough to say, "Uh, no, I don't think I can do that."

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: I said, "Okay. I understand." And I thought, well, where can I go? My favorite king cake in town is Keller's. That is my favorite king cake. But Keller's king cake is-- it's a sweet king cake, and they're a bakery that does traditional baked goods. And I thought, no, I don't know that they'll understand this item, because this item was boudin and bread and cracklin and then a little sweetness with this syrup drizzled on top.

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But it's not a sickly-sweet king cake as king cakes traditionally are. And Keller's doesn't do what people in New Orleans would call a traditional king cake, but it is a traditional king cake in the sense that it's a sweet.

Phillip Norman Reid: Uh-huh. Gotcha.

Robert Carriker: Anyway, right down the street from me was a place called Twins Burgers and Sweets. And Twins Burgers and Sweets does hamburgers and French fries, and they make their own hamburger buns. And they also do cakes and petit fours and cookies and things. So I thought to myself, all right, if there's any chance it's probably Twins because they do sweets, but they also do savory stuff, and they make their own bread. And this is what it's really about is it's a bread, it's a stuffed bread at its core.

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It might make sense to them. So I went down there. I'd never met these guys before, even though it's only a quarter of a mile from my house. And they're younger guys, Billy and Denny Guilbeaux. And I went in, and I talked to Billy. They're twins, Billy and Denny are twins. And I talked to Billy, and I said, "So, listen. I've done this thing. I've made this boudin king cake. A story has been done on it." He wasn't even aware of it. I said, "There's a lot of interest in it. A lot of orders are coming in. I said that I could do this, but I definitely can't, but I think you guys might be able to. I don't know what to tell you, " I said. "I know there's literally hundreds of orders piling up in my inbox right now. So if you guys want to do this, I think it could be a really cool thing." And they came back to me in about an hour and said, "Yeah. You know what? I think we can do it."

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I never even showed them the would-be orders that I had piling up. So they just sort of took this leap of faith.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Similar personalities to you, apparently. [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: Yeah. Right, right, right. They took this leap of faith. And I said, "Okay." I said, "Great." And so I went home, and I set my email on autoreply and I said, "We're not doing the boudin king cake here anymore, but Twins Burgers and Sweets is going to be taking it on, and so please contact them for your boudin king cake orders." And then, at the same time, the reporter who had done the initial story, they're seeing their story blow up, of course.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Yeah.

Robert Carriker: And she wanted to know more than ever, okay, how can people really get these things? And so I checked in with her and I said, "So, look, I'm not gonna be doing any more. The demand is overwhelming. But Twins is going to be doing it."

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So she did a follow-up story because the story was going so big, and her follow-up story was, on Tuesday, Twins will open and they will have the boudin king cake fully stocked and ready to go. And so I talked to those guys on Friday. So between Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday they literally were making thousands of boudin cracklin king cakes. And when they opened their doors on Tuesday there was a line around the building of people waiting to get them.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, my goodness.

Robert Carriker: And in the meantime, places in New Orleans are starting to make it, and places in Dallas are starting to make it, and places in Mobile, Alabama are starting to make it.

Phillip Norman Reid: Wow. Okay.

Robert Carriker: And places in Mississippi are starting to make it, and all over the place.

Phillip Norman Reid: This is all during the 2015 Mardi Gras?

Robert Carriker: Yeah. This is all during 2015, yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Wow, that's crazy. And when you were getting these inquiries-- 'cause you said Los Angeles.

Robert Carriker: Oh, yeah.

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Phillip Norman Reid: So it wasn't just local, it was, like, national.

Robert Carriker: Oh, no, not at all. Absolutely.

Phillip Norman Reid: So if folks were out of state, I mean, did they have ties to Louisiana?

Robert Carriker: Yeah, they did. They had ties to Louisiana. Exactly.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: Somebody had forwarded them the story. They were probably-- I think you'd call them "displaced Cajuns," "displaced Louisianans" who love their boudin, who love their king cake, and saw, oh, this is fantastic! I want in on this. But yeah, I was even getting them internationally. Which I did know enough to say to the people who were inquiring from abroad that this will not work. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: No way I can send something [inaudible 0:58:43]

Robert Carriker: There's no way I can do that. So I think those are the only people I said no to.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] That was the line, yeah. There you go. I ask 'cause it's such an interesting sidebar to this is, like, Louisiana has one of the richest culinary traditions of any of the United States really, but there's also such a history of economic and infrastructure issues and natural disasters.

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It's very easy to get displaced from Louisiana.

Robert Carriker: Right. That's true.

Phillip Norman Reid: So king cakes and these Louisiana staples are probably some of the most shipped foods in the US.

Robert Carriker: Yeah, I think so. Oh, yeah. No, I think you're absolutely right. You're right. And that's an aspect to some of these foods that it's easy to overlook, but you're right. At king cake season, yeah, these king cake places, part of their business is clearly shipping it. Yeah. Because there's all of this shipping infrastructure that they set up. And boudin, absolutely. You go to these big boudin places and they're all shipping it and they're all selling Styrofoam coolers so that you can take it away. Yeah. People want to bring this stuff back to where they are now, or they want to introduce it to the people who are around where they are living now.

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Phillip Norman Reid: I've heard of people shipping red beans and rice, crawfish, everything.

Robert Carriker: Um-hm.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, it's interesting. I've heard of people shipping red beans and rice, crawfish, everything.

Robert Carriker: Nobody is shipping Aplets & Cotlets, though. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, that's the difference. Right.

Robert Carriker: When this eventually goes out there, I'm gonna get an inquiry from the Aplets & Cotlets people and they're gonna say, why did you have to be so mean?

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Deride us.

Robert Carriker: Say, well, have you ever tried your jelly candy? [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Nothin' to write home about. Nothin' to ship home. Well, thank you for telling the entirety of the story. I'm literally on the edge of my seat because I've been really excited to get this. So I mean, just as it has developed, what's it been like to see other people recreate it? I mean, you said it happened as soon as that Mardi Gras.

Robert Carriker: Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: And then, just in the years since, it's grown in popularity obviously.

Robert Carriker: Well, I'll tell you.

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The other thing that happened with this was-- okay, so when the interviewer for the news story asked me which boudin I used for my first prototype boudin king cake, I lied to her, because I-- so I am the boudin guy. The truth is, I went to the grocery store. I don't even want to say what grocery store I went to, but I wanted to spend as little money as I could, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Sure. Right.

Robert Carriker: And so I bought boudin at the grocery store. I didn't go to my favorite meat market to get the boudin because I was only doing this for the photo, and I did not expect that anybody was going to really, really be paying any attention to this.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah.

Robert Carriker: So when she asked me, "So which boudin do you use?" I lied and said it was one of my local meat markets. Well, then what happens is this, the story goes out there and the story is that I am making the boudin king cake and selling it from my home kitchen.

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Well, apparently, this caused some trouble. It ended up causing some trouble for me, as well, and the trouble is this, I'm not legally allowed to go and buy boudin from a meat market, bring it home, put it in a king cake, and then start selling it. There are food safety laws that don't allow that to happen.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And not only am I not allowed to do that but, in fact, the meat market is not allowed to participate in that either.

Phillip Norman Reid: To sell to you, right.

Robert Carriker: They can't sell to me if they know that I am then repurposing their product and selling it. Okay. Well, one of the lessons of this story is-- and it's a universal lesson and you'll learn it over and over and over throughout the course of your life-- some people are very happy with other people's success.

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Some people will embrace your success, and other people will be challenged by it, and they will be jealous of your success, and they will try to bring you down. And so there were people who wanted to bring down the-- it was Billy's. I had said that I was using Billy's, 'cause I liked Billy's boudin.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah.

Robert Carriker: And so, then, there were some people who didn't like that Billy's was getting this attention, so they called the United States Department of Agriculture on Billy's and said, hey, hey, hey-- it was one of their competitors, I'm sure. Who, I have no idea. They called up, reported them to the USDA, and said, "They can't be doing this." So now, all of a sudden, the people at Billy's Boudin and Cracklin have the USDA inspector talking to them saying, "Hey, you are selling your boudin to this guy who's using it to sell boudin king cake out of his kitchen. You can't do that."

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So I actually get a phone call from the owner of Billy's, at my house. She says, "What in the heck have you done? You're telling people that you're using our product? You can't do that." And I'm saying, "I understand. I'm not using it. This isn't happening. You're not in any jeopardy. It's not true." And she says, "Well, this is what it says in the paper."

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Oh, God.

Robert Carriker: I'm, like, "Well, I know. I kinda, sorta-- I kinda lied about that. I wasn't even manipulating the truth. I just made that up 'cause it sounded good. Really sorry for having caused

this trouble. But don't worry about it." And then I get a phone call from the USDA, United States Department of Agriculture meat inspector, and he calls me up and he wants to tell me that I can't be doing this, that I am in violation of federal food safety laws. And I'm on the phone with him saying, "I understand. I'm not doing it though."

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And he says, "Well, it says right here that you're doing it." I said, "I realize that, but I said that I was gonna do it, I had some ideas that maybe I would, but I'm not actually doing it. Please, you can come over and look at my kitchen if you would like." Eventually, I had to have a sit-down, face-to-face meeting with the meat inspector where he painstakingly read me all of the federal regulations on meat safety that are in place. And I appreciated him doing that, but at that point I wasn't actually making any illicit meat products from my kitchen, as they thought that I was. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, right. I was curious to know if there was a dark side to this story. [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: Yeah. And then, there's an even darker side to it, and that is a year later-- or maybe it was two years later-- a year and a half later in the summer I was at a boudin place in Alexandria, Louisiana.

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And I stopped in. I was going on a hike, and I stopped in to test their boudin to review it and I was taking pictures, and so, as often happens, the people at these places said, "Why are you taking so many pictures?" And I'll tell them, "Well, I have a boudin-reviewing website." They said, "Oh, okay." And this young woman comes, and she says, "Uh, the owner wants to see you."

And I thought, okay, well, that's nice. It's not unusual that the owner wants to see who this guy is that's going to be reviewing his product.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: So I go into the back office and it's sorta awkward. He's behind a desk. I sit down and say, "Yeah, so what can I do for you?" And I'm just expecting to tell him that, "Yeah, I review boudin. No problem." And he says to me-- he sits back in his chair, and he says, "We have a problem."

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: And I'm thinking to myself, okay, I am not sure what he's talking about. I said, "What do you mean, 'We have a problem'?"

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I mean, if he told me he didn't want me to review his product I would say, okay, fine. He knew who I was, apparently. He says, "We have a problem." Says, "You are telling people that you invented the boudin cracklin king cake and that isn't true. We did."

Phillip Norman Reid: Wow.

Robert Carriker: Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: And so I am sitting there and I'm thinking to myself, huh. So I know that I didn't take their idea because I knew that my idea was my idea unto myself. But I'm aware enough to know that sometimes other people have had an idea that you think is your first idea. So I'm aware that it's possible that maybe they had done this, and I was unaware of it. And so I

say to him, I was, like, "Oh, my gosh. What do you mean?" He says, "Yeah. You're telling everybody that you've done it and you're taking all the credit for it, but we actually did it."

1:08:02

And I wasn't going to say no, because, again, it's certainly possible that they had. I said, "I don't know what to tell you. If there was some sort of confusion, I'm sorry. I certainly didn't take your idea. What I did was new to me." And I said, "I wouldn't know what to do anyway. It's kinda taken on a life of its own." 'Cause, again, this was, like, a year, year and a half later.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: I said, "I can't really take all this back. I apologize. I certainly am happy to look into this." And so he was very, very upset. I don't know what he wanted me to do. And again, I wasn't actually making anything, so I wasn't anybody's competition. But what I did, of course, is I come back to Lafayette, and I go to the guys at Twins, and I said to them, I said, "Look, I was in Alexandria and this guy said that they made this, and he's really upset." I said, "I don't know about that.

1:09:04

I didn't take this idea from them." Because I didn't want the guys from Twins to feel like maybe I had taken somebody else's idea and then brought it to them like it was new. I just wanted to be up front with them about what was going on. And they said, "Oh, well, yeah, that's interesting because we talked to that person at a local golf tournament, and he was saying that same sort of stuff." And I said, "Okay. Well, I don't know what's going on here." So I got online, and I did a little search, and it was absolutely unbelievable. What I found was that two days after our story had gone viral, they had a story saying that they were doing the boudin king cake. But it was

after our story had already gone viral, so clearly, they must've known that this idea had come out of Lafayette, right?

1:10:03

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And then, when I went to their Facebook page to see what they might have been saying and promoting about their boudin king cake thinking that, well, maybe if their story came out two days after ours maybe they had done this a few days before or something like this.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah.

Robert Carriker: So I wanted to see what they had been saying on their Facebook page. Well, you know what I saw on their Facebook page?

Phillip Norman Reid: What's that?

Robert Carriker: I saw pictures of our boudin king cake that they were using to promote their, "their" invention of the boudin king cake!

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Right.

Robert Carriker: So literally the person who was sitting across from me had taken my own pictures and was saying that I had taken from them when they had actually, in fact, directly taken from us.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, man.

Robert Carriker: So I then went back to Twins, and I said, "This is this scenario, this is what's going on. These people are out of their minds. I don't know what they're doing, why they're doing this, why they're saying all of this."

1:11:03

And there is nothing to prevent anybody anywhere from making a boudin king cake, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, right.

Robert Carriker: And so then the guys at Twins had their attorneys send a cease-and-desist order to the place in Alexandria saying you can't call yourself the original boudin king cake because you're not and you've taken the pictures that are part of our story and you're misrepresenting this, so please stop. And they did end up stopping. Yeah.

Phillip Norman Reid: Wow. Just lazy fraud. They could've made their own!

Robert Carriker: They didn't even make their own and take their own pictures of it!

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter]

Robert Carriker: They were actually using our pictures! [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. It is shameless, absolutely shameless.

Robert Carriker: Absolutely shameless. Maybe the owner had been misled by somebody in his own meat shop. I don't know. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. That's crazy.

1:12:00

Well, a couple more questions that'll kind of take it back to king cake in general and where this fits in into the legacy of king cake.

Robert Carriker: Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: But to kind of get there, I think, again, when we were talking last time about how boudin is this uncorrupted regional staple, and you're, like, "Well, maybe putting it in a king cake is corrupting it."

Robert Carriker: Right. Maybe I can corrupt it. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So does anyone find this thing to be, like, an abomination. You have the side of like--

Robert Carriker: Well, yes and no. Of course, there's always some people who, any time you mess with anything that they hold near and dear to their heart, they're offended by that.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: But those people are just not having fun with life, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Sure.

Robert Carriker: And so, of course, there's always the curmudgeons out there, but the world isn't moved forward by curmudgeons, so they're just overlooked.

1:13:00

No. Virtually everybody just saw this as a really fun iteration of Cajun food that people love and Louisiana food that people love. And a merging of these four things into one that just really

spoke to everybody. And I say the four because it was king cake, it was boudin, it was cracklin, and it was also-- we've sort of overlooked this-- but it was also the Steen's cane syrup on the top.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Robert Carriker: And Steen's cane syrup is this historic sugar-producing company and sugar-syrup producing company that's just iconic.

Phillip Norman Reid: And of this region.

Robert Carriker: And of this region, yeah, out of Abbeville, just twenty miles down the road. And so it had all four of those things going on in one item.

1:14:00

And that's what really captivated people.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. So locally and with the displaced it was really viewed as just a--

Robert Carriker: It was everything.

Phillip Norman Reid: -- celebration of the culture. Yeah.

Robert Carriker: Right. Yeah, absolutely. Right. 'Cause if you think about it, those displaced Louisianans, they're sittin' around sayin' to all the people who will listen to them, oh, I miss king cake. Oh, I miss boudin. Oh, I miss cracklin. Oh, I miss Steen's. And they're saying other stuff, oh, I miss gumbo, and oh, I miss crawfish, but then, all of a sudden, there's this one thing that's four of those in one. Like, ahh, I've gotta have it and I've gotta share it!

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. I can get it all together shipped once.

Robert Carriker: Yeah. And the misunderstanding that some people have that's sort of this visceral negative reaction to the idea of boudin king cake is they think of king cake as king cake traditionally, which is sweet, and they think that this is somehow you've put boudin into, like, a cream-cheese-stuffed king cake. And it's not that. It's a stuffed bread. It's a savory item.

1:15:01

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. Right. With a slight sweet touch to it.

Robert Carriker: Right. With a slight sweet touch to it.

Phillip Norman Reid: And that was going to be kind of my next question. And certainly of the people I've talked to this is not the only one that deviates from a traditional king cake, but what was your understanding at the time or now if what are the components at bare minimum every king cake needs, and then, how does this fit into that?

Robert Carriker: I don't know how to answer that. I think every king cake, it should be round, and that's about it. [Laughter] Or oval shaped, roundish.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. So you make bread and put it into an oval.

Robert Carriker: And put it into an oval, exactly.

Phillip Norman Reid: Gotcha.

Robert Carriker: Right. Because I know the traditional, traditional king cake-- and what's it called? It's called something else. It's got the name--

Phillip Norman Reid: What, the French traditional--

Robert Carriker: Yeah, the French--

Phillip Norman Reid: Galette des Rois.

Robert Carriker: Galette des Rois, right. It's still round but it's an actual circle, and it's that puff pastry with the almond paste in it or the marzipan or something like--

1:16:04

Phillip Norman Reid: Almond paste.

Robert Carriker: Yeah, almond paste in it. So yeah, round is the defining feature. And sweet. And it should be more of a coffee cake idea. Clearly, whenever we veer into turning it into a savory item, we're only having fun with it and not in any way thinking or expecting or wanting this direction to be the direction that this product should take. No. I think anybody who plays around with food and with recipes has an inherent sort of respect for the tradition of it because you have to. You have to understand and value that's what it is before you start messin' around with it. Yeah.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Well, another thing you did that struck me as traditional based upon what other people have said is you braided the bread.

1:17:00

Some people will say with the New Orleans style king cake you have to braid it.

Robert Carriker: Yeah. Right. And why did I do that? I don't know. Well, because most of them are braided.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah.

Robert Carriker: Right. Right. I'd never done that before, but I have two daughters and so I, in that moment, was actually starting to figure out how to braid hair, so I knew how to braid something.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, interesting.

Robert Carriker: And I'm joking, but I'm actually honest about that, 'cause braiding is very easy and obvious, but not unless you've actually done it. [Laughter] Because there have been so many people who I've talked to and said, "And I braid it." And they're, like, "Braid it? What are you talking about? Braid? How would you do that?" And I was, like, "Well, you just crisscross it. That's all. You just crisscross it."

Phillip Norman Reid: [Laughter] Just like braiding hair. That's interesting. That's a cool family connection. And then, what about the baby? Is there a baby in a boudin king cake, in the one that you first made?

1:17:58

Robert Carriker: So if only, if only I would've had a little tiny pig, a little piglet, that's what I would've put in there, but easier said than done. So no, there was not a baby of any type in the first one. No, there wasn't.

Phillip Norman Reid: When they started making them at Twins?

Robert Carriker: I don't think so. I don't think that they-- I'm not sure. We definitely, though, talked about how great it would be to include a little piglet in there. And that is a great idea, and that would be the way to go but nobody makes thousands and thousands and thousands of little,

tiny piglets as big as the tip of your pinky as the baby is that goes into a king cake. And so it's just an item that doesn't really-- it doesn't exist out there. That's an idea for somebody. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. Get the baby piglet in there. Well, I'll just ask you this other question about the baby 'cause I'm asking everyone, and it does tend to be a hot topic, and this is an interesting wrinkle with the pig.

1:19:00

But what does the baby represent? What is the significance of the tradition? What color should the baby be? These are all controversial questions, so what are your takes?

Robert Carriker: Right. [Laughter] Here we are, right? People are dying in mass graves in the Ukraine, and these are the important questions.

Phillip Norman Reid: Exactly.

Robert Carriker: But I think that without question what it's intended to represent is baby Jesus. I know that it used to be a bean, like a gold bean. Way back, way back in French culture, I believe, it was a little golden bean. But I think it always was still representing the baby Jesus. So I guess that's what I'd default to. So if it was a pig, I don't know. I don't know how that would continue to represent that. But then, the color, I guess if I was thinking of tradition, I'm aware enough to know that gold would be a good color.

1:20:04

But anymore I just expect it to be a little flesh-colored baby that I would see in there. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. It’s generally a white baby. That's what--

Robert Carriker: Yeah, I guess. I guess. But probably just because those are the little plastic things that you get made by the hundreds of thousands out of China, I suppose. What was I-- I don't know what I was gonna say. I had some compelling idea on this, but it slipped my mind. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: I think the term for what it is is a fève. I don't know if I'm saying that right, f-e-v-e.

Robert Carriker: Okay.

Phillip Norman Reid: And the bean was the original fève, and then there's all these different iterations.

Robert Carriker: Yeah.

Phillip Norman Reid: It's interesting, too, 'cause the secularization of it over time is, like, oh, it's not the baby Jesus. You know there's just different interpretations of [inaudible 1:20:56].

Robert Carriker: Right. If it is for you, it is, and if it's not for you then it's not. Oh, I know what I was gonna say.

1:21:00

I think there was some-- gosh, it was just this last year-- you probably know more about this than I do 'cause you've been researching this stuff. But there was some social media-- they read images to make sure that there aren't inappropriate images that are showing up on their platforms. They're just digitally read. And they read some pictures of the babies for the king cakes as being offensive because they felt-- their reading of them felt that they were naked children.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, right.

Robert Carriker: And so they banned them. They flagged people who were putting these things out there.

Phillip Norman Reid: Huh.

Robert Carriker: And they labeled it as something that it clearly is not.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. This is going into, like, a child pornography server or whatever?

Robert Carriker: Yeah. Exactly.

1:21:57

And it wasn't because-- I don't think there was any human that was making that call, but it was the machines that would read this stuff and they recognized the image as being a baby and being naked. And so they said, red flag, red flag, red flag.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. That's interesting. Well, just sort of to wrap up, as the legend has grown, what is it like today?

Robert Carriker: So it's fantastic! It is absolutely fantastic because I-- so I learned early on not even that I was trying to do this, but I learned early on that you cannot copyright a recipe. You cannot do that. So if I come up with a brand-new recipe for the world's best chocolate shake, well, I can't copyright that recipe. Anybody can make that. And so the idea that somehow no one else should be making your great creation is lifted.

1:23:04

That doesn't exist. So all you can do is embrace the idea that people were inspired by this to make it themselves and to improve upon it, or whether it's improve upon it or– but just innovate upon it themselves. And I see that every single king cake season. And the way that I see it is you can set your Google feed-- there's a way to go into Google, I don't remember now how to do it, but I did it at some point-- and every time a particular term shows up in the news you will get a notification for it. So some people like to do that for themselves, for their own name. I'd like to know when my name pops up in the media. But you can do it for anything. So I've set my Google to boudin king cake.

1:24:02

And so anytime there's a news story that pops up I get a notification in my email. And so I see these things and I see it pop up in Dallas and I see it pop up in Wisconsin, and I see it pop up in Lake Charles. And so I see that there are news stories about people who have started to serve this crazy new invention, the boudin king cake. And I love every time that I see it because I know that I'm the person that kicked all of that off.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. So it's purely joyful, yeah.

Robert Carriker: Purely joyful, yeah. It's tremendous validation.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Well, this will be truly my last question, but I'm just trying to tie together your different interests. Do you see what's happened with the boudin king cake as kind of like a public historical project or act in the sense of--

1:25:01

Robert Carriker: Oh, yeah, absolutely. And it's not in the way that you might think. So public history is this sort of-- had been this sort of rogue aspect of history. And there were conventional historians who sat in their ivory towers and felt that history should be done one particular way, and you should not deviate from that. They're very sophisticated and they're very elitist. And then public history came along, and people were saying, okay, yeah, but we can do something else with it. And we might have to do things a little bit different. And we might have to look at things differently. And we might have to take some chances. And public history might not always look exactly like stodgy old conventional history looks.

Phillip Norman Reid: Um-hm.

1:26:01

Robert Carriker: And we're gonna have to be okay with that, and we are okay with that, right? And so my having gone into public history was because I see things through a different lens, and I can see things more creatively than maybe old stodgy conventional history sees things. I embraced that, as did all other public historians who were especially doing this early on.

Phillip Norman Reid: Totally.

Robert Carriker: And so, yeah, you have that ability, and you have that inclination to be creative and to see, how can you do things differently? And let's not just take the path that everybody says the path has to be. Yeah. And this is very much a part of all of that.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. That's really cool. That's just one thing that stands out to me about your story is, like, yeah, you're this professor who moved here from elsewhere but then did these things, the zenith of which is the boudin king cake that's really embraced regionally, and very connected to the local culture, which is cool.

1:27:03

Robert Carriker: Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: Was there anything else you want to add about any of the above?

Robert Carriker: No, I'm good. [Laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Not at all. [Laughter] Great. Well, thank you so much for doing this. We're going to let the recorder run for thirty seconds just for editing purposes.

Robert Carriker: Okay.

1:28:02

[End]