

JOSEPH GUIDROZ
Previous Owner – Guidroz Food Center – Lafayette, LA

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Date: January 23, 2009
Location: Guidroz Food Center
Interviewer: Mary Beth Lasseter
Length: 28 minutes
Project: Boudin Trail

[Begin Joseph Guidroz]

00:00:03

Mary Beth Lasseter: Today is Friday, January 23, 2009 and this is Mary Beth Lasseter. I'm here in Lafayette, Louisiana at Guidroz. Could you please state your name and tell me your birth date and what you do for a living, sir?

00:00:15

Joseph Guidroz: My name is Joseph Guidroz and I'm officially retired, but I'm making boudin. And my birthday is October 22, 1927.

00:00:27

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about this store, and I might add that while you're talking to me you're stuffing boudin?

00:00:35

JG: Right; correct-a-mundo that's what I'm doing--stuffing the boudin(s) and I don't have too much to say for myself. All I ever did was grocery and meat business and started this in '59 and we're still going strong.

00:00:52

MBL: How did you decide to open a grocery store? Had your family done work like that before?

00:00:57

JG: Well I started working in a grocery store; I was 12 years-old. That was in 19--1939, the year before the flood, and I just stayed with it. That's all I've done all my life.

00:01:18

MBL: Did you own that first grocery store that you worked in or did your family own it?

00:01:22

JG: No, ma'am; no--oh no. I went to work for a stranger. I was only 12 so I delivered on the bicycle and then kind of graduated to inside the meat market then it just kept going from there but always in the grocery business. And then in 1959 I had an opportunity to go into business for myself and I took a chance, and I've been--been at it ever since.

00:02:07

MBL: Tell me a little bit about your store. What do you make and what do you sell here?

00:02:10

JG: Well we sell some groceries but mostly meat--a variety of meat. We--we specialize in specialty meats where the people--in fact I think we're about the only meat market left with actual butchers that--that cut meat--I'm talking about hanging beef and not boxed beef. We buy hanging beef and break it down into parts and make different cuts.

00:02:49

MBL: Is there a slaughterhouse in the back of the store or--?

00:02:51

JG: No, ma'am; we buy from a slaughterhouse but it's on the other end of town, called Kirk Martin's. We do buy all our pork from other companies; they come from Iowa and different places. But all our--all our local beef and we don't handle the heavy, heavy beef. We handle heavy calves, all feed-lot stuff, but it's slaughtered locally.

00:03:30

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about this neighborhood where this store is located? I understand that this is your third location?

00:03:36

JG: My third location but on the same--almost in the same--the same spot just across one--I started across the street from where I am now. And moved on this side of the road and then in '77 I built this store. Then in 1987 or so my son took it over--kicked me out.

00:04:05

MBL: Tell me a little bit about your family history if you would? Where is your family from and do you consider yourselves Cajun?

00:04:11

JG: Yes; I do. My--all my family on my mother's side lived in Saint Landry Parish and my father's family came from around Loreauville, but that's just Saint Martin Parish I believe.

00:04:33

MBL: And how many siblings did you have?

00:04:34

JG: Had four--I'm sorry; three. We were four--no, no I was correct the first time--four siblings.

00:04:46

MBL: And what did your parents do for a living?

00:04:49

JG: Sharecroppers [*Laughs*].

00:04:52

MBL: Here in this parish?

00:04:54

JG: Well around Carencro. That's in--that's in Lafayette Parish but also in St. Landry Parish. Moved around a lot; we moved from Carencro to Lafayette in 1937. I was 10 years old and I started school but by the age of 12 I was in the second grade and I--I quit school to go to work. That's it.

00:05:30

MBL: So you've worked in the grocery business ever since?

00:05:32

JG: Ever since--at the age of 12.

00:05:37

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about your family--how many children do you have and--and tell me about your son taking over the family business?

00:05:45

JG: I've got two sons and two daughters. And I guess you could say I groomed my son since he was five years-old or four years-old when I went in business for myself, so he was raised in the grocery business. And that's about all he knew so he took over.

00:06:11

MBL: And the family lived very near the store? You had a house that was next door to the store I believe or near it?

00:06:19

JG: Our original--I lived in the same building--the store was part of the house. And then when I moved in 60 [side partly inaudible conversation with son Alvin, who takes over stuffing the boudin so the interview can continue without Joseph working. Joseph states, "I'm more comfortable this way--well then maybe she can question you.] [*Laughs*]

00:06:38

MBL: I'll question him in a minute; he was going to take over some of the stuffing of the boudin so I can be interviewing.

00:06:43

JG: Okay.

00:06:45

MBL: But okay; you were saying the store was next--was attached to the house?

00:06:49

JG: Yeah; it was all one building and we had two bedrooms and a bath and--and the store. And then in '67 when I moved on the corner where the parking lot is I had bought a building and hauled it there and opened my store there. And in '77 I built this and moved and here we are since--ever since.

00:07:19

MBL: Did your kids work in the store when they were little?

00:07:23

JG: Yes; they did--they all did. But only one stuck with it, so that's why he wound up here running the store. My youngest daughter, she worked in the store for a while but when she graduated and went to college then now she works at a bank; she's a loan manager. My other daughter got--got married at 18 when she graduated and now she has a mechanic shop and my other son, he--after he graduated he went in the service and spent a little time there and he came back and went into the insurance business. Did good with that; so now he's retired. And then I

have this one here who is **[Laughs]**--I'm stuck with. Well you got just about all the story of my life there.

00:08:27

MBL: Well tell me a little bit about your boudin and your recipe 'cause I know the store uses your recipe.

00:08:32

Son Alvin shouts from the side: Put the microphone off.

00:08:34

MBL: I won't give away any secrets--.

00:08:38

JG: Don't give away any secrets. Well you saw the whole process except for the seasoning and like I told you it's all done by touch and sight, like your grandmother used to put a pinch of this, **[Laughs]** a pinch of that, a smidgeon of this. And that's the way I was taught so I taught that to my son. And he's been doing it the same way and we've had very, very good success with it.

00:09:04

MBL: What spices do you use in your boudin?

00:09:07

JG: We use red pepper, salt, garlic powder, and we use onions, and celery and that's about it--
the old-fashioned kind.

00:09:25

MBL: Do you consider your boudin a hot boudin?

00:09:29

JG: No; we make it for a whole family to enjoy--the kids as well as the adults, so it isn't too
spicy.

00:09:39

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about how you recommend cooking boudin or warming it?

00:09:45

JG: Well you--you put a pot of water on the stove to boil it and once it's boiling you drop the--
whatever links of boudin(s) you have and you cook it for about seven or eight minutes or you
have to be careful for not the water to come back to a big boil because if it boils violently it
could break the casings. So if the water comes back to a boil too quickly you lower the fire and
you let it stay in there for about seven or eight minutes.

00:10:22

MBL: When do people eat boudin? What meal is it served at?

00:10:25

JG: No particular time; they eat it all the time. *[Laughs]* I've got some people that come in here now that are second and third generation. When their--when their kids were two years old when they first started eating, boudin(s) was one of the first things that they--they ate. Now their kids are coming in here and buying boudin(s).

00:10:53

MBL: How do you like to eat your boudin?

00:10:55

JG: Just after the link is cooked I like for it to stay in the colander for a little while and so it'll--it'll kind of dry up; then I like to just bite on it--that's it, the only way to eat it.

00:11:14

MBL: How did you create your recipe? Did your mom teach you or your family?

00:11:18

JG: My mother--I learned how to season stuff from my mother.

00:11:25

MBL: And did you used to make boudin before you owned the store?

00:11:30

JG: Yes, yes; I made boudin(s) in other places that I worked.

00:11:38

MBL: Is it a tradition around here for people to make boudin at home or do they always buy it from specialty meat shops?

00:11:43

JG: Well it's--*[Laughs]* I don't know; now days nobody makes boudin(s) at home.

00:11:51

MBL: Why do you think that is?

00:11:54

JG: Because the younger people don't know how to go about making boudin(s). A lot of them ask, how do we do it? You tell them but they always think it's a little too much work, and it is a lot of work.

00:12:09

MBL: Now how much boudin do you sell here at this store?

00:12:14

JG: Oh 600--700 pounds a week I guess.

00:12:18

MBL: And who is buying it; who are your customers?

00:12:21

JG: Well a lot--or most of it is repeat business, people that keep coming in every day--day in and day out to buy boudin(s) and then they bring it to their friends in Texas, Mississippi, or Georgia--all over the place. So it's--and the only advertising we do is by mouth. We don't advertise in the paper; we don't advertise on TV. People tell others; go to Guidroz and get boudin. They got the best. And we try to keep that tradition to always make the best product.

00:13:04

MBL: Now are you mostly selling it raw [cold] so people can take it home and heat it up or do you have a lunch business here?

00:13:10

JG: They--we sell it mostly cooked; we do sell some uncooked to go out of town, out of State. But mostly it's--it's sold already cooked. Most of them they start eating it before they leave the store. *[Laughs]*

00:13:33

MBL: Well this morning we are making boudin. Can you tell me a little bit about the schedule and what happens on a day when you normally make boudin? What time do you get in?

00:13:42

JG: Well my son gets here at 5:00; I don't usually come in until 7:30 or 8 o'clock.

00:13:48

Son Alvin speaks from the side: Yeah; he's got banker's hours.

00:13:49

JG: Yeah; I'm the unpaid employee. *[Laughs]* I just do it to keep myself in--in shape and listen to them people--well my fellow employees complain. *[Laughs]*

00:14:11

MBL: Now what day of the week do you make the boudin--always on Friday?

00:14:14

JG: Normally on Tuesdays and Fridays; sometimes in between or sometimes even before. It--it all depends; sometimes it sells faster than others. And when the weather is cold it sells better than when the weather is hot. But it's a year-round thing now; we sell it year-round.

00:14:37

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about the steps you take to make boudin? How--how do you start?

00:14:44

JG: Well we start out by cutting up the meat, put it in a pot, put the seasoning that we need in there, add water and let it boil 'til it's cooked. So that way we get that good gravy; all the--the juices from that meat stays in that juice with the seasoning, so that's why our boudin is one--one link will be the same as the other. They're--they're won't be one hot, hot link and the other one not too hot because in the mixing process, when we mix it all the seasoning goes all over everything--the rice and--.

00:15:27

MBL: Do you cook the rice separately from the meat?

00:15:30

JG: Oh gosh; yes, ma'am. [*Laughs*] And I guess that's--I guess there's a secret to cooking rice too. We just take it for granted it's sort of normal you know. We just put so much rice in the pot and add water and salt and you put it on the stove.

00:15:52

MBL: Do ya'll use Louisiana rice?

00:15:52

JG: Oh yes; Louisiana long-grain rice we use--I think we're the only ones that use long-grain rice. It's a good bit more expensive but I've always found it was better. That way your--if you use short-grain rice it makes a mushy boudin. So we get our--our consistency in our boudin that it's not mushy.

00:16:20

MBL: Earlier when I was here today you were showing--your son was showing us some of the equipment. Can you tell me about what equipment you used when you started making boudin years ago and what that compares to--how that compares to the equipment you use today?

00:16:34

JG: Well when I first started out you--you'd put it in a pan similar to that stainless steel pan over there and you'd put your meat and rice in it and you'd mix it by hand.

00:16:50

MBL: And then what would you use to stuff it in the casing?

00:16:52

JG: What would I use to put it in the casing? A bull horn--a bull horn from the first--when I first started and then I graduated to a--a hand stuffer; it's a manual deal, made 30 pounds at a time. And it has a--a spigot on it and it has--you--you crank it just like you know--.

00:17:22

MBL: How much boudin could you make in a day using that sort of machine?

00:17:26

JG: Well that sort of machine? Oh if you'd do it--it would take a little more time than what we got now because now we make--when we put our cylinder together we put 100-pounds of product in it at a time. The other one was only 30-pounds and you had to keep refilling. So it--it would take a while longer but if I did just that I guess I could have made 200 or 300-pounds.

00:18:05

MBL: Now your customers that come here to buy your boudin, do they live in the immediate area or do they--I know you said some people travel from out of State. Are they long-time customers; how long have they been coming here?

00:18:16

JG: Well like I said some of them are long-time customers--40, 50 years. Some very old people that come in that have been buying boudin since 1959 from me. And they're still coming in; and then they tell that friend; that friend says--so many of our local people have moved out of State and when they come back to Louisiana to Lafayette they come here and get boudin(s) to bring back to their friends. So if their friends happen to come to Louisiana for any reason at all, they come here and get boudin to bring back with them. I had a--a lady that came here from--well she moved to Alaska; they were working. And she bought boudin(s) and brought to Alaska and then a friend of hers came and visited Louisiana one time and she came here and got boudin(s) to bring back to Alaska with her; so it's--it's been pretty much all around.

00:19:23

MBL: What do you think it is about this area or the people who live here that--that make the food so popular here and why don't you see it in other parts of the country?

00:19:32

JG: I guess well all of Louisiana--just about all of Acadiana they're strong on boudin(s)--Lafayette, Carencro, Scott, New Iberia; they all have--Jennings--they all have boudin making places.

00:19:55

MBL: I've heard that some boudin makers offer types of boudin other than pork--crawfish or shrimp. Do ya'll do that here?

00:20:03

JG: We make a--a seafood boudin during the--Lent--Lenten season. Other than that we stick with the traditional pork.

00:20:12

MBL: For those who may not know can you explain why that--why you would make a seafood boudin during Lent?

00:20:18

JG: Because there are a lot of Catholics in Lafayette that want to eat seafood on Fridays.

00:20:29

MBL: And do you mix--still mix the seafood with rice; everything else stays the same, but the meat ingredient?

00:20:33

JG: Everything stays the same except we use seafood instead of meat. We use crawfish or shrimp and--it's--it's very good but it's not a--it's not as big a seller as the traditional pork.

00:20:53

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about how you taught your son your recipe?

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JG: By him watching me for years and years [*Laughs*] and trying to explain to him on how it's done, and he picked it up pretty good. I guess he feels pretty intelligent.

00:21:14

MBL: He looks--he looks to be. [Son Alvin laughs from the side.] If you could tell me a little bit about your recipe; do you do it by specific measures--a cup of this and a cup of that or do you do it by feel?

00:21:24

JG: Well it's like a cup of this and a cup of that. We don't use a cup; we use a spoon but it comes to the same thing.

00:21:34

MBL: And how do you know how much gravy to put in it?

00:21:37

JG: Well you've got to determine how much boudin(s) you're going to make and our pot--or pots that they use, you use a certain amount of meat and then you fill the rest with water, so that you'll get the--the gravy to mix with the--with the rice and the meat. It usually breaks out pretty close to--I guess we've been doing it so long it's just--it's the feel.

00:22:12

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit--are you happy with your chosen occupation? Has boudin making been good to you?

00:22:21

JG: Come again.

00:22:22

MBL: How do you feel about your choice of work? Has boudin--boudin making been good; this grocery store been good for raising your family; would you do it all again?

00:22:30

JG: I certainly would; it's been very good. I think I've raised a good family. They're all pretty well fixed. They've got education, which I didn't get but that's all right. I--I didn't pass that on.

[Laughs]

00:22:48

MBL: And is there anything that I haven't asked you today that you would like to share with us or tell us about your story or boudin making?

00:22:54

JG: I--I think you got the whole story. I done divulged all my secrets.

00:23:01

MBL: Well let me ask you very quickly; I see that you've got on a shirt that says Guidroz Food Center but your hat says Richard's. Is--is that your competition? *[There is a boudin store in the*

area named Richard's, but the hat Joseph Guidroz is wearing is affiliated with a local vendor from another business named Richard's that sells pork products to Guidroz Food Center.]

00:23:11

JG: No, not really; Richard's sells us sausage and he gave me this hat and he usually comes on Friday, so I wear it for him to see it. **[Laughs]**

00:23:20

MBL: That's great.

00:23:22

JG: Is that a pretty good answer?

00:23:24

MBL: That's a great answer. Another question; do you know other folks who make boudin in the area? Do ya'll get together and talk about how it's done or--or do ya'll sort of keep secrets within the family?

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JG: Well people that make boudin(s) just--you don't get in groups and talk about it; it's just not something that's--I guess we get enough of it--do enough of it that we don't have to--we don't like to talk about it after work. **[Laughs]**

00:23:54

MBL: Now what time will ya'll finish up here today? Are ya'll already done making boudin?

00:23:58

JG: Yeah; now he's going to make some--some sausage.

00:24:02

MBL: So in addition to boudin what else do ya'll make here by hand? What are your other menu items?

00:24:06

JG: Well the sausage and all the meat is cut--cut by hand and--.

00:24:13

Male: Hog head cheese.

00:24:15

JG: We make hog head cheese.

00:24:18

MBL: What is hog head cheese?

00:24:20

JG: [*Laughs*] Hog head cheese--well a--a long time ago there wasn't much meat on the head so the people would boil it and take whatever meat they had on it and make a--it would gel. You'd put in a little tray and it would gel and then you'd eat it like--like you serve luncheon meat or

ham now you see. But we use pork shanks and we put it in a great big pan and it gels real, real hard and then we can slice it with a knife and just like you would a luncheon loaf or--or ham.

00:25:07

MBL: One last question--I promise. Do you speak French?

00:25:15

JG: Yes; I sure do. I speak a lot better French than I do English. **[Laughs]** When I started school at 10 years-old I didn't know a word of English.

00:25:28

MBL: So your family spoke French at home the whole time?

00:25:30

JG: Well I--I speak French every day. I try to speak French to somebody. I've got two sisters that are--they were also not able to go to school--that speak French, so we talk French. Then I got lots of friends that I talk to and I talk French. My fellow employees I talk French to them but they--I don't know; they don't catch on too quick. But one of the employee's father and his mother we still talk--well, I talk to his mother in French still. So French--my French--I love my French language.

00:26:17

MBL: Do your children know it?

00:26:17

JG: Not too well; not too--too good. They're--they understand a lot of it but they--they can't speak it.

00:26:30

MBL: And do you see these traditions--the food traditions and the language traditions, are--are they being passed on to the next generation?

00:26:38

JG: Not very much; I feel that a lot of this tradition is going to fade because of the younger people not wanting to get involved in making all this stuff, and they--they don't want to work hard, and this is hard work. So that's why they're getting away from that; they want to sit at their desk and just play with register or play with the computer. They don't want to--they don't want to do manual work and it's--it's--that's what it's getting to. Now that--you're young but you're not that young, so that doesn't pertain to you. *[Laughs]*

00:27:16

MBL: *[Laughs]* I don't know if that's a compliment or not. Well on that note we'll end this interview today and I thank you very much for sharing your time with me.

00:27:26

JG: Thank you, ma'am.

00:27:26

[End Joseph Guidroz]