

DAMON “TINY” PRODHOMME
Owner – Tiny’s House of Meat – Broussard, LA

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Date: January 23, 2009
Location: Tiny’s House of Meat
Interviewer: Mary Beth Lasseter
Length: 50 minutes
Project: Boudin Trail

[Begin Tiny Prudhomme]

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Mary Beth Lasseter: All right; this is Mary Beth Lasseter with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Today is Friday, January 23, 2009. I'm in Broussard, Louisiana. If you could for the record, please let us know your name, your birth date, and tell me what you do for a living?

00:00:15

Tiny Prudhomme: My name is Damon Prudhomme most folks around here call me Tiny. The name of my business is Tiny Prudhomme's House of Meat. My date of birth is April 1, 1971 and we do specialty meats. We do boudin, cracklings, any kind of specialty meat to order. We do breakfast; we do lunch; we do whatever you want. We have a--a variety of menu to choose from.

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MBL: Specialty meat seems to be a common phrase in businesses around here. Can you describe what it is and why it's used?

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TP: There's--there's a difference. You can go to Wal-Mart and buy meat or you can go to a big grocery store and buy meat. It's different than buying a specialty place to where you have seasoned meats that are done in the traditional way that people used to do back in time and I say back in time--back in the earlier days of stuffing them with onions, bell peppers, and garlic and so forth to where the consumer doesn't have to go home and do it. It's already prepared; it's seasoned. You go home and transfer it into a pot and you're ready to go. So it's--it's specialty in

that; plus there's other things--items that we do is we make duck sausage, duck tasso, different items--chicken and chicken--different chicken deals. We stuff and debone chickens and that's where the specialty comes into it more than anything.

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MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about the style of cooking that is around here?

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TP: Mostly traditional, I mean it's the rice and gravies, the jambalayas, the etouffee(s); I mean that's more of what you're going to find around here and one of my favorites is sausage in a tomato gravy. Lot of people don't know a lot about it because that's one of the--a lot of poor people ate that because that's all they had. All you had was tomato sauce and either smoked sausage or some fresh sausage laying around, so they made a big meal for a big family that--that couldn't afford to go out and buy the pork and the beef or didn't have it. So it--it's actually an awesome dish if you've never had it before; it's very good to eat over rice.

00:02:18

MBL: So you do eat it over rice?

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TP: Yeah; you eat it--everything is eaten over rice. You're not a coon ass if you don't eat nothing over rice.

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MBL: Good deal. Can you talk to me a little bit about how you got into the food business?

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TP: Family--my uncle is a chef in New Orleans; he owns K-Paul's in New Orleans, Chef Paul Prudhomme. My aunt here in town was open for quite a while and just handed down becoming a salesman. We went out and we cooked and did different things and then came to be the--just opened my own place after people told me you know why don't you do this yourself. And that's kind of where we're at today and that's how it's unfolded. And we're going into our fourth year of business and going strong.

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MBL: Did your parents cook a lot?

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TP: They did; they cooked at home. I mean it wasn't nothing to this capacity but I mean my--we had home-cooked meals every night. It was something--we didn't--we ate out very little. My dad worked a lot so we didn't go out to eat. Very often when we did it was once a month or twice a month--not like a lot of people today go out five--six times a month. So we got a bunch of home-cooking but it wasn't to the capacity of what we do today.

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MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about your family; what your parents did for a living and your siblings?

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TP: My dad is--was a welder by trade. My mom was a homemaker. Kind of funny; she works now. **[Laughs]** She does; she works for the hospital now and--but before she was a homemaker and stayed home and took care of us. We were three kids; I lost a brother when he was 20, so--other than that I mean we just--we were pretty much a normal family. I mean my sister works for a doctor's office now and has a--a kid. I have a 15 year-old and she's getting into learning to cook and wanting to cook and do different things. So it's--it's really fun; we're having a good time with it.

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MBL: And what did you do just before opening this store?

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TP: I was a salesman. I--we did sales--oil field sales for about seven years and traveled around town to town running on rigs and calling in different companies here in town and just going out different places and that kind of got me interested too to find out the way different people in the--in the Louisiana cook 'cause it's so different from South Louisiana to North Louisiana, you know. We're here; we're the big rice and gravy and bread. Up there they're potatoes; a lot more people eat potatoes up north. Believe it or not just being North Louisiana and you--the more you travel farther north the more they're in the--the potatoes. **[Laughs]** Like us, we eat rice; they're up there and they eat potatoes, so it's very interesting.

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MBL: What would you consider to be the rice line?

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TP: I would have to say probably Alexandria maybe--somewhere around in that area. Once you start kind of getting out of there then you're going to start seeing more people eating potatoes where there's a lot more potato items with--with different stuff. They don't eat as many gravies as we eat; that's where the--the white gravy and biscuits come--to me is when you further north. So I mean South Louisiana and this area has--is very good with the--the--the deep rich flavors to me more than you would up north or middle Louisiana or even if you go into Texas or Mississippi. So it's--it's definitely a unique place to be.

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MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about your menu--the things you make both prepared for people to take home and the things you sell hot here?

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TP: We do a variety of smoked sausages. We do a chicken and jalapeno smoked sausage which is a little different from a lot of people. We smoke all our own meats here; we do it the old-fashioned way with wood. There's no electricity. We make seven different fresh sausages from pork and jalapeno to chicken and jalapeno, chicken and shrimp and jalapeno; we do all the stuffed pork chops plus the--the marinated rib-eyes and t-bones and so forth. We have the stuffed deboned chickens with several--several varieties of food. We do some stuff with stuffed breads; it's a--just a French loaf that we stuff with a--a smoked brisket and pepper jack that we put in the oven. If you want it, it's hot and ready to go. You can also bring it home and put it in the oven and do it that way. We have another flavor that we call a Tex-Mex that's kind of a queso type

cheese, Rotel, and onions and hamburger meat with cheese and we fill another one like that.

They're cut, ready to go, and prepared. All you got to do is put them in the oven and open them up--bag of chips and you're good for a meal, so that's Super Bowl--Super Bowl items. So we do stuffed mushrooms, stuffed bell peppers, chicken wraps, just a variety--variety of different items. The list will go on and would take us forever so--but that's some of the main stuff we do.

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MBL: Do you consider those foods Cajun?

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TP: Um, yes and some of them--I found--I found that the--it seems like the longer it goes on--since in the last 10 years I think Cajun has been broadened way too much. Everything is a Cajun this, a Cajun that and that was one of our--our deals here that they asked me why I didn't name my business a Cajun specialty meat--because I didn't want that--um I'm trying to think of the word--the enigma of having Cajun put with my name because so many people have turned that into pepper. Everybody thinks if it's Cajun it's pepper and it's not; it's all about flavor. Everything we have in here there's nothing that's hot. It might be spicy but it's not hot and I--that's why I say Cajun--Cajun is flavor. And to say that most of this stuff is yeah; it's pretty Cajun. I mean I just consider it down home more than Cajun--just more of a down home cooking style.

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MBL: What would you consider your family's background?

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TP: Cajun. [*Laughs*] My--my parents and my grand--my dad was--my--my mother is from Monroe and that's where I learned a lot of what the potatoes and stuff is--she's from Monroe in Arkansas and my dad and them were born and raised in Opelousas and Port Barry. It's very versatile on which way you want to go; I'm trying to remember the question you asked me now. I done lost it.

00:09:13

MBL: Was just asking about your family background.

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TP: Oh so I mean it's--it's very different; my mom learned how to cook the way we did or we--my grandparents did and we learned the way to cook the way her grandparents did. I mean it was nothing to get up in the morning and there's a fine line between the two. They're from Arkansas but every morning when we woke up as kids my grandmother was--bacon, eggs, biscuits, the same thing as we did here, just cooked in a little different way. I mean every--I find everybody's menus are the same. Everybody just puts their own little twist to it. I mean my Uncle Paul says that too; there's probably 2,000,000 ways to cook chicken. It's just which way is the best for you, you know. So I mean the background of it is Arkansas, North Louisiana and then Opelousas, Port Barry, so three different cultures.

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MBL: Can you talk to me a little bit about how you mentioned jalapenos in your sausage; how long have jalapenos been part of the food traditions around here?

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TP: I think they've been around forever. Not necessarily jalapenos; I mean chili(s), Tabasco®--I mean Tabasco® has probably been around longer than people really knew what--what jalapenos were. I mean I'm sure they were around too; I haven't--I haven't done too much study on it but I mean the Tabasco® plant here in--in New Iberia has been around since the 1800s. I mean it's one of the oldest facilities we've got anywhere around here, so I know for a fact that that's been around for centuries. So jalapenos itself, I--I really don't know but as far as I can remember anybody else--they've been around for quite a long time.

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MBL: Can you talk to me a little bit about where you get your ingredients, your meats and your rice?

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TP: We get most of our stuff from distributors meat-wise out Marrero which is right outside of New Orleans. We get some from one of the packing plants here in town in Carencro which is Frazier's Wholesale and that's the majority of where we get our meat. The rest of the stuff is all made here. The sausages are made here; the smoked is made here; everything else that you would see is--is made here in the store. We don't buy any packaged things from outside vendors and just change the packaging and put it in, and I say that I guess I'm lying to myself. We do some--we carry smothered rabbit and stuff like that--that I buy from a distributor. But it's all marinated with our own ingredients and own seasonings here.

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MBL: I lost my thought; what was it going to be? *[Laughs]* Can you talk to me a little bit about your clientele? Who is stopping here and are they buying food to eat on the spot or food to take home?

00:12:09

TP: It's a variety of both; we do mainly people are picking stuff up to go and either bring home. And we have a large variety of breakfast items that we do, so in the mornings we deal a lot with the oil field companies around here in town. They pick up sandwiches and different items to bring different places and bring to their customers. We do--cook briskets and pork roasts and it's really--it's really weird to see what people bring for breakfast now days to different customers. It's really--really weird.

00:12:46

MBL: Can you talk to me, since this interview will go on the Boudin Trail, a little bit about your boudin and the development of your recipe?

00:12:53

TP: We have a normal traditional boudin--pork boudin that we use--onions, bell peppers. We use tomatoes, onions; I'm--I'm probably one of the only places--places in this area that we don't use liver. Everybody else around here uses calf liver in their boudin because it has--that's what people used traditionally is that--I don't know if you know anything about the traditional boudin of what it was consisting of. Normally when people slaughtered pigs they took their--their roast and everything else and put it aside and they used the remainder of everything *[Laughs]* which

sounds really disgusting and made boudin with it--any of the remnants that they had over from the ribs and the--anything that they took off--the hanks and everything else they made boudin with it, and one of them is the liver and the--I don't know if you've ever heard of cowboy stew. That's another cuisine down here. I don't like it but a lot of people use because they never got rid of anything because they tried to utilize everything from the cow when they slaughtered or the pig when they slaughtered. And the liver was one of them so they put it in the boudin but it gives it a real strong--if they put too much it's too--it's too strong. And we found that we didn't need it 'cause we kept taking it out and saying well it's already still a little strong. But we kept taking it out and finally we decided why do we even put it in it? So our boudin tastes completely different from everybody else's because it doesn't have that liver taste in it. Now we have a lot of people coming to us saying I like your boudin 'cause it doesn't have the liver taste. You know and some--some people even come in and ask you know what--what do you make your boudin--? You tell them and they go I don't think I've ever known anybody not to do it. And then when they eat it they go God; this is--this is--this is weird 'cause it doesn't taste the liver. **[Laughs]** And it's like well that's why because it doesn't have none in it. So it's really interesting the way different people make it but normally everybody makes it pretty much the same until it comes to seasoning. That's pretty much the difference.

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MBL: And do you make your own seasoning blend?

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TP: We came up with our own seasoning blend but a company out of Opelousas makes it; they blend it for us 'cause we get it on such a large scale. That's pretty much the only seasoning we

use; it's basically a Season-All. It has salt and pepper and paprika and black pepper and white pepper in it and a little bit of chili powder and stuff like that and it's all blended together. It's real--like I said earlier, it's very low in salt; we don't have a lot of salt in our--in our seasoning but it can be spicy too if you don't watch what you're doing. But it's something that's very complimentary to the meats that you eat. It's not spicy; it brings out the flavor in the meat. We also make our own marinade for steaks. I make that myself; nobody else makes it, which is also very complimentary. I--I think it's one of the best around and I'll put it up against anybody's marinade for steaks. It's very different and it--but it's very good; I enjoy it.

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MBL: How do you get your recipes? Do you develop them by trial and error or are you using family recipes?

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TP: Shaking--not stirring; if you want to put it--shaking a little too much when you shouldn't have. I find with cooking that recipes come from mistakes. There's a way of following recipes but I don't think anybody from the past really followed recipes unless they were baking because baking is so precise. That's why I don't bake 'cause I don't like being precise. And recipes that we have just evolved from there because I like--I'm very creative with the stuff that I do and I like to find different ways to change--to change something to make it my own. I'm a big *Food Network* fan; I love the *Food Network*. I'm always looking at different recipes and I try to take the--the basic recipe on something and make it my own. Changes--changing whatever it is in it and instead of using red bell peppers using sweet bell peppers and seeing how that changes the flavor of the dish. And then it's not theirs anymore; it's yours and that's what I think cooking is

all about is making something yours. And that's what makes people come back is because it is different, it is something new to try; it's not something that--that's so spicy you can't breathe whenever you're eating it. And that's how we develop all our recipes. I still do follow some recipes but not much.

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MBL: Did you begin to develop your recipes after you opened the business or had you done some cooking at home before?

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TP: I think a variety of both but the majority has been since after we opened 'cause we do so much more cooking now. I've--I've came up with my own barbeque sauce, because I can't get the one that I like because of shipping being so expensive. Nobody around here carries the brand that I like. One company does but that's a whole different story on why they can't get it, but so I said well I'm going to cut costs and I'm going to start making my own. So I came up with my own little thing and the first one I made tasted like crap. I mean it was nasty and we threw it away and started over again and just kind of went from there and took it a little slower and now I come up with one that--that actually has a very good taste for it and it's good on everything we have. Is it going to appease everybody? No; probably not--somebody is not going to like it. You can't--you can't please everyone in this business--not at all.

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MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about the people that you work with? Do you have any family in the business with you?

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TP: They're assholes--all of them. *Laughs.* Yes; I do. My wife works here. She handles more of the books. I've got two other girls that are working; as far as one--that's kind of unique too. I'm the only meat market in town that has nothing but women. I'm the only male that works here. My head butcher is a girl. She does a bunch of good stuff for us and--and takes care of us. I've got a couple other girls that work plus my wife being here. My father-in-law does the books with her; he's retired. It gives him something to do to come in. If you know anybody that's looking for a job here in town I'm looking; please--please. But I mean it's very family owned, very family oriented. I mean you can tell from the décor that we have it's not your typical meat market. When you walk in you don't look and see and smell just meats and it looks just hum-drum. It's a typical place that you just want to come to; it is different. It's a little different style. We usually have the TV on and if it's Saturday we're watching ESPN and you know and it just gives a whole different atmosphere to the--to the--and ambience to the place just to give it a little--little different pop.

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MBL: It's a very warm retail space. As I look around I see some vases of flowers; it's not usually what you see in a butcher shop.

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TP: Dogs playing poker on the curtains kind of changes things.

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MBL: Can you talk to me about the schedule here? When are ya'll open and what is a typical day like for you and your staff?

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TP: Monday through Friday we're open 6:30 to 6:30--full 12-hour days; Saturdays we're open from 8:00 to 2:00. A typical day--you start off pretty--pretty busy usually. This is like I said our kind of slower period at times because of the holidays and everybody is trying to get back in the swing and the oil field slows down on this time--for people's budgets and so forth. So but our mornings are really, really busy and we're pushing our catering business a little more, so we're--we're trying to do more caterings for oil field companies or personal people--anybody on the street, you can come in and get it done. We offer services either out or in; if you want them done I have a cooking trailer that we use that we go from--I go from here right--easiest way to put it is I'll go anywhere a pocketbook will take me. If there's a road to get to it I'll--I'm going to go, so--. But we do sides and baked beans, rice dressings, and all that stuff. If somebody is cooking and you just wanted the sides, we do those too. We do--we started doing a thing I call--we don't--we don't prepare lunch every day. I started doing a thing called *custom lunches* that you have a group of 10 or more that want lunch we cook what you want and we do it in a plate lunch style. It gives you a little variety of what more--that as a group you--from anything you want; I mean étouffée(s) and steaks, whatever you want; we do it that way. It's a little easier for you and a little easier for us.

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MBL: You mentioned rice dressing and that seems to be a common dish around this area. Could you please talk to me and describe it?

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TP: Another unique thing; rice dressing is probably another way that you can cook--it's a very basic dish. Some people call it dirty rice; some people call it rice dressing. Dirty rice, more people from the northern part will call it dirty rice just 'cause of the way that it looks. It just looks dirty and that's where I think the term--terminology came from. But I--I make mine in a very non-traditional way. I don't use liver and gizzards in mine. It's just got a good flavor to it; I use nothing but ground meat, onions, Rotel and seasoning, a little bit of Worcestershire® and some garlic powder and Cajun powder stuff but that's it. I don't--it's just a mix of the blends on how you mix them that I think we have a unique rice dressing. It comes out very good and doesn't have that big strong liver taste. I love it and my grandmother's probably got the best rice dressing in the world and it's got liver in it. But I don't make mine with it because there's so many people that don't want it. It's something different.

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MBL: You start off in the morning and then you--you make the lunches for people who order. When do you make your boudin? Do you have a schedule about what things are made on what days?

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TP: No; we--typically when we run out. I mean I got some in the back cooking in a pot right now. We're--we're just about out, so tomorrow we'll be running boudin tomorrow. I mean we--we do it pretty much on a need-to-be basis. We don't have a particular schedule--we're making

boudin on Mondays and Fridays or we're making sausage on Wednesdays and Thursdays--just as we need it we make it.

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MBL: Do you freeze it or how long is it shelf-stable?

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TP: No; nothing over here is frozen except for the stuffed chickens and stuff. I do keep some calf liver and beef tongue and stuff here which we're--we're the only ones that do that now too, you know. [*Laughs*] You don't have a whole lot of markets that keep that anymore just 'cause they don't and so we keep that kind of stuff frozen. Everything else is pretty fresh. Shelf life on it is three--four years if you freeze it right away, you know so I mean it lasts quite a while packed and sealed.

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MBL: Has your daughter shown any interest in working in the family business?

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TP: No; not at all. She--she does--I say no; she--she does show some interest. She likes to cook but she's a typical teenager. She's 15 and she has nothing to want to do with work or being around here. She'd rather be with her friends talking on the phone and so forth, so I'm hoping it changes later on a little bit 'cause I do have intentions of opening a restaurant. I don't know when or where but it's going to be somewhere in town so I'm hoping maybe she leans towards maybe that 'cause eventually I'm going to sell this. And that's where I'm gearing my way to go is

towards the restaurant and that's why--that's why I'm pushing my catering business even more to give more people the--the exposure to it--to where when I do go into the transition of a restaurant people already know the food. They already know that--man I know that place 'cause I've had this and it's going to be good. So that's what we're trying to gear it that way a little bit more.

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MBL: So your aspiration is to be a chef then?

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TP: Uh, yeah; some people already call me chef. But I don't think I'm even close to being a chef. I think it takes a little bit--I don't necessarily think it takes going to school and having a degree in it. To be honest with you I don't think my--my uncle has even got a degree in--in Culinary. I know he's been to some schools but most of my family that are chefs now it's been coming with experience and that are now considered chefs these days. So it--being a chef, you know not set on looking for the title but--the restaurant part of it yeah I'm looking very forward to it.

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MBL: Let's talk about your other nickname, Tiny; tell me a little bit about how you got that?

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TP: You really want to know? Do you? You will have to edit. I tell everybody it's the--I'll give you the clean version of it. It only takes one person to see you piss in the woods and then it just

sticks. That's the clean--that's the dirty version of it. Actually no; I got it from--we were--we were at--when I was in the selling [*Laughs*]*--you need to stop a minute? We were at a--a fishing tournament when I was in sales and there's a guy that worked for an oil field company that was standing next to me and he's about six-foot, seven and was probably about four and a half on the hoof, and one of the ladies that was with--with the guy's wife said god-damn you're tiny next to him. And believe it or not it stuck from that day on and it's still the same today and it's going strong for almost eight years now, so--. That's one of the--one of the many nicknames I do have. I have a couple others from school and from another job I had but--. I know what era I'm in when somebody calls me from the different names. But that's how it started; I tell everybody the other--the other joke just 'cause it's funny.*

00:27:32

MBL: That it is. Tell me a little bit about--okay when we cut off the microphone I'll hear the other joke. [*Laughs*] Can you tell me a little bit--you talked about how your grandparents were from different parts of the State--does your South Louisiana family consider itself Cajun and how would you describe that cultural term?

00:27:57

TP: Yeah; they consider them--I--I consider myself a coon ass, not really Cajun. I mean Cajun--to know how the term really came up I don't know. I think Cajun was more of a given thing of--of--it was just a name that was given to somebody that came from a different region and it just--the name was thought up. I think more of it as being--I really don't know. It would be hard to--I guess I would have to research it more I guess to give you a really good answer on it because I think it's used more as--as just a term. I just think it's something--I'm trying to think of

something that I could use to go with it, but like a Yankee. You know how did the Yankee really become a Yankee, you know and I think it came from a song. You know so I mean Cajun and coon ass and everything else--I think coon ass was just a--a dumb name somebody gave one of us 'cause they were stupid, I guess. And I think--do we consider ourselves Cajun? Yes; I do because this is the culture we live in and that's what it's been named. So would I consider I was Cajun? Yes; I--I do, yeah--if that answers your question. I think I kind of floated around that one a little bit but--.

00:29:23

MBL: Yeah; it does. Talk to me about the boudin that you make; do you ever eat it and how do people eat boudin?

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TP: Actually no; I don't eat it very often at all--believe it or not. I guess because we're around it so much I really don't have a--I don't even taste it when we make it. I make somebody else taste it. It's eaten very different ways; some people eat it on bread; some people eat it like a Po' Boy; a lot of people take it out of the casing; some people eat it--some people don't. I used to eat it on bread with mustard. I'd take it out of the case and then just make it like a sandwich and then eat it that way. Yeah; actually spicy mustard or Creole mustard or something between the two-- normally most people eat it straight out of the--out of the casing and just eat it that way. A lot of people eat it on crackers. I don't think there's really a wrong way to eat it. But that's the main-- main way people eat it today is that way--mostly with bread.

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MBL: And do you recommend that people boil it or grill or--?

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TP: The easiest way to do it is boiling it. Just take some water and let it boil real good and drop it in. I--I recommend people to put it in for about two minutes and then turn it off and let it sit and when it's hot to the touch it's--it's ready to eat. Barbequing is very good; grilling it makes it a little snappy when you eat it. It's--it's got a little bit more crust so it gives it a different flavor. We also do smoked boudin that's actually smoked on a smoker, so that's--that's pretty interesting too. It gives it a whole different flavor of your boudin. I mean changing from one way you eat it and then somehow you eat another one and you go God this is--this is weird you know 'cause it does change it different. It changes the taste quite--quite dramatically but it's good either way. I wouldn't recommend frying it. You might end up with a little bit of mess. I wouldn't--no; I wouldn't recommend frying it.

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MBL: Do you make boudin other than the pork boudin, any seafood boudin here?

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TP: Yeah; I make a--we make a crawfish boudin. According to the guys at the Boudin Link I've got the best anywhere around town, so I'm--I'm trying to push that a little bit more towards Lent with Lent coming up because we don't sell a bunch of it. I don't know if it's that people don't know we have it or we just keep it frozen but we're trying to--we're trying to push that a little bit more because it is so good. It--I--I honestly believe it's the best around town anywhere down here compared to the ones I've had before. We started off with a seafood boudin which we use

crawfish, crab, and shrimp. And then we just kind of toned it down and said well it wasn't--the cost was more than what I wanted it to be because it is more expensive than regular boudin to make and so we just went and we said let's just use crawfish. And it's to me been great; I think it's--I still think it's one of the best out there.

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MBL: For those who may not know this area's culture, can you talk to me about why Lent would be an appropriate time to sell it?

00:32:39

TP: Lent is--it's Passover I think they call it. *[Laughs]* Whenever--Lent is part of the time that people fast or supposed to be a fasting part from Mardi Gras which is coming up--say Easter and--I'm Baptist; I'm not Catholic so I don't know. *[Laughs]*

00:33:06

MBL: South Louisiana Catholics don't eat meats on Friday.

00:33:08

TP: Meat on Friday except on Fridays they eat seafood, so *[Laughs]*--I'll tell you something else when you hang up 'cause some people won't like what I have to say about it but it's funny. That's the way it came up was--was with that; people instead of eating meat they ate seafood and that's where all the seafood dishes started coming and especially down--'cause it's so plentiful. When your seafood buffets come up and everything else you know people are eating shrimp 'til they can't eat shrimp no more. That's where it all comes from is from Lent.

00:33:43

MBL: Can you tell me a little bit about who your customers are?

00:33:47

TP: I would--I would say probably 85-percent of it is oil field related. We do a bunch of oil field stuff especially in our catering plus just our everyday business especially in the mornings. As I said earlier, we got a people that come in--in the mornings that will bring breakfast to different companies and--and stuff like that so I would say 85-percent of it is oil field related. The rest of it is the general mo-jo off the street coming in to get stuff for--at home. We probably have more men customers than women but we are trying to find ways to get the women consumers in a little more. We--we're one of the only ones with a drive-thru window. So we try to push it towards the ladies that they don't have to get down. If they know what they want they come through the drive-thru and you don't have to get the kids down. You don't have to do none of that. And then we're starting to do cooking classes. We're fixing to start doing some cooking classes from the beginners to a group of people that already know how to cook that want to try to do something different. There's a group of ladies that I know that they all know how to cook, but they want to try to see if they can do some different things that they don't necessarily normally want to do. I find there's a lot of stuff that--that people want to do; they're just scared to try it, so why not let them come here and try it and see if they can do it. If it goes bad it goes bad; it's not a big deal, so we're going--we're going to start off with that and try to get a little bit more of the ladies in, but it is open to anyone.

00:35:09

MBL: You talked about the cooking classes and then earlier you were mentioning that you were looking for employees. Do you find that there are a lot of people around the area who know this craft or people who want to learn this craft?

00:35:21

TP: No; I don't think there's anybody who really wants to work. **[Laughs]** To be honest; I mean I'm being about as honest as I can be. It's--it's really difficult to find people that want to really work and come in and learn different things. It's sad to say but it--it sounds like it's like people want to just come and get a check and go home and really don't want to be involved in what they're doing. I've--I've tried to be passionate about everything I've done in every job that I've been. I've been a cop; I was a cop for 12 years. I worked in the oil field in sales and now I'm doing this and I try to take it to the best way I can do that job. And I find it's a lot of lack now in that perspective with--with employees because it's not--it's not something they want to see themselves doing later. And it--it takes a special person to do this kind of business. I mean we do a bunch of repetitive stuff that you do every day and making sandwich trays; you're on your feet a lot. Holidays come around and it's even worse because now you've got an influx of everybody that don't want to cook now you're cooking all their meals, you know. We do--we do Christmas dinners and Thanksgiving dinners from the beginning to dessert. I mean we do the whole meal and you don't find a lot of people that want to learn that anymore. They would rather be on this side buying it and going home and doing what they got to do and go what it is they--they like to do. So it is; it's very difficult to find employees that really want to do this--do this job and then really enjoy it. So I'm blessed with the people I have so far.

00:36:52

MBL: What do you think this means for the future of these traditional foods in the area?

00:36:57

TP: It's hard to say; it's--it's a dying breed in some ways if you look at it. There's not as many people that are--that are really interested in going out and doing the cooking and stuff. Every--I have found that this culture has gotten lazy--very lazy about doing things and unfortunately I'm taking advantage of that because I try to give people something to go home and cook that's good and do it in a quick manner because you don't have to sit and mess with it as much. I--I would love to see more people get involved in cooking and doing stuff and going home and actually coming and getting stuff and going home and cook with their families again. It gives you a little family time even though we never sat around the kitchen table. We always ate in front of the TV but everybody ate together. You know so it--it really--it was family time but it wasn't family time I guess you can say; so but I think it's dying. I think there's a lot of people out here that don't want to--they don't even want to mess with it anymore--sad--sad assumption see you know because it is--it is so much fun. It is fun to do this; I enjoy the hell out of this stuff. I mean I--it gets monotonous and it gets tough a little bit but it's--it--it really is fun. It's a fun, fun, fun deal.

00:38:14

MBL: Can you describe your facility to me a little bit so the people can have an audio record?

00:38:20

TP: Like I said whenever you come in it's--it's very country looking I guess if you want to say--the, I mean we have the--the normal stuff but it's also very homey with TVs and it almost looks like you're walking in your living room. You know so it's a little different than what you would

see normally. It--it's just very, very quiet; I mean it's not real busy you know. Like I said you really feel like you're at home when you come in with the TVs and the--. We have very limited groceries; we don't carry a bunch of grocery items 'cause we're not a grocery store and I don't want to be considered a grocery store. I'm a specialty meat place. When you come to get stuff here I want you to know that you're getting specialty stuff; you're not just getting run of the mill big grocery store items, so--.

00:39:09

MBL: How much--

00:39:09

TP: The best I can explain it; I didn't--there's not a whole lot more to explain on it I guess. We give--we give free coffee too. Can you believe we actually give something for free and we're not a bank?

00:39:19

MBL: That's nice. How does this break down in terms of retail space and kitchen space and butchering space?

00:39:25

TP: Retail space--small; kitchen space--small; other place--small; we outgrew it very quick. And I don't--I don't know how you want me to explain the--the breakdown on it exactly.

00:39:39

MBL: Did you buy this place--was it already an operating restaurant?

00:39:40

TP: Yes; it actually was a Subway before we opened it. It was completely gutted; the whole front--I mean they had the chairs and the desk and the, you know the normal stuff that you would have in a Subway if you walked in it but we took everything and gutted everything out. I mean it's been from scratch. The walls have been painted; everything has been completely redone in here. The kitchen space is pretty limited. You don't realize just how small it gets until you start adding stuff in it and then the next thing you know you need to add something else and then you're fighting for space now because you don't know where to go with it. I lease this building so I really can't add on until I buy it which it's--it's going up for lease to own here next month, so we're going to start making payments on it. So hopefully later on we can do a little more with it.

00:40:31

MBL: Where do you go to get all of your specialty equipment for the specialty meats?

00:40:37

TP: There's a company that's here in town that's called Cochran Sales; they're located on the north side of town and they carry a majority of all the butcher needs that you need, like your saws and your grinders and your mixers and all that stuff. They can get that for you. There's a couple other people around town that have them but if you need it they have it. It's not something that you know--pretty much they're going to get it for you. I mean you can also get a lot of stuff on the internet. There's a lot of companies on the internet that carry quite a bit of the

stuff that we have. Coolers--there's several different places; I actually got mine off the internet.

So I mean there's--there's several places to get it if--if you need what you need.

00:41:22

MBL: If you come here and spend a long day and cook the whole time you're here how do you cook at home in the evening?

00:41:27

TP: I don't. Well I say that; I do now. It's hard and that's probably why I gained most of my weight is 'cause I go to McDonald's 'cause it's so much easier. I mean whenever you get out of here you really don't feel like going home and cooking chicken or cooking steak or doing--you just want to go home and just relax and it's so much easier to go to McDonald's or Burger King and--. But we've been watching what we've been eating lately and trying to cook more at home, so now I'm cooking--I go cook one meal but I cook it for two days, so we eat on it a couple days plus we're eating healthier now. We're trying to eat a little bit more healthy and trying to get back in the routine of doing things and get off the McDonald's and all that. It's killing me but it's working. But no; you really don't feel like going home and cooking after cooking all day long. It really is difficult.

00:42:19

MBL: Do you see any seasonality with how you sell your foods--things that sell better at certain times of the year?

00:42:27

TP: Not really; the only thing that to me is really seasonal is cracklings and boudin 'cause to me the--the colder it gets it's--it's a hot food, so during the summer--. I'm--I'm like that with coffee. I'm not a coffee drinker but hot chocolate I don't want--I don't want that during the summer. Or gumbo; I don't want gumbo during the summer. To me that's--that's a winter food. Chili is a winter food to me. But I mean normally just boudin and cracklings to me is more of a winter food and it seems to pick up at that time. And then I can lie; tomorrow it can be 80-degrees and sell 40 pounds of boudin a day you know. It--it just all depends on what--but yes; I think that's the only really seasonal thing that we have is that--besides the gumbos 'cause we have ready-gumbos too that we sell out of the case.

00:43:15

MBL: Can you talk to me a little bit about the stuffed breads? What's the tradition there?

00:43:20

TP: I don't think it really is a tradition. I think it's more of somebody put some stuff on some bread 'cause I know as a kid I--I ate everything on bread. I mean I ate--I'd--I'd take potato salad and put it on bread; I would take rice and gravy and put it in bread. I think it's just our nature of eating bread and we just took the idea and--and we're not the first one that's done it. There's--there's many, many places that have different kinds of stuffed breads that either bake it into it or make it the same kind of way we do. I don't--I don't think it's really a tradition on anybody; I think it just came up and it was easy. And people took what they had when they ate at home and did the same thing; so that's--that's pretty much the way we came up with that.

00:44:05

MBL: Are you using traditional New Orleans French bread or do you buy it from a local provider?

00:44:11

TP: Actually I buy it from Albertson's, the local store here in town. They have French bread loaves that are very good, very inexpensive, and they're delicious. I can't ask for a better bread. They really are good.

00:44:23

MBL: Some--many of the folks around here that we've interviewed speak French and I'm wondering do you speak French or do folks in your family do it?

00:44:36

TP: My dad speaks a little bit; my grandparents do. All I know is cuss words; that's it. I don't know--I know very, very little French. Another thing I find that is failing this area is that a lot of people don't know French anymore and I--I'm not a big person on making somebody learn it in school because I find the French that they teach in school is not the French that people speak here. I--and I kind of separate it in a fact that England teaches proper English; they speak proper English. We don't; we speak broken English. Paris speaks proper French; we spoke broken French and I have--the way--the way I look at it they call it--they call it Cajun French in school but I really don't--I still don't see the--'cause you can--I've got friends that know French from school that can't go home and talk to their grandparents 'cause they don't know what they're

talking about. And I just think that's sad because why do I want to learn something I can't talk to the people that I know speak French? They don't understand what I'm saying. And that's--I think it's sad that they don't teach the French that's spoken here. And I don't--I didn't learn it in school because of that reason. I--I'm disappointed in it now 'cause I wish I would have learned it through my grandparents so I could communicate with the people like them, but it--it's hard. They don't--they don't teach it so unless you learn it from an older person or somebody that knows French you're not going to learn it the way it should be learned. So I'm not a big stickler on pushing French on people. I wish I--I wish I would know it; I really do 'cause it--it really does enhance your--your life a little bit you know to be able to speak French.

00:46:20

MBL: Do you older customers speak it?

00:46:23

TP: Yeah; we have some older customers that speak it and they'll come in and they'll throw a couple words at you and you go huh? I don't know what you said and they go oh man; I can't believe you don't know French. But again it just goes back to the culture that we live in these days and if I really wanted to take off from that I could but I mean it's not what this is about. I just--I really wish--I wish my daughter would learn it, but my grandparents are getting older and we don't see them very often, so everybody that I--I don't know anybody else that speaks French that can actually teach her French. But my neighbor's mom and dad speak it fluently and they--it would be nice to be able to talk to them in French because they really enjoy speaking French. And--but I'm getting too old for that now.

00:47:08

MBL: Can you tell me what your favorite thing you make is?

00:47:16

TP: Huh; anything?

00:47:23

MBL: Anything I could buy in the store and take home?

00:47:25

TP: I make a seafood and corn soup that's out of this world that it's got shrimp, crab, crawfish; I've put oysters in it before but it's with a cream sauce and it's a creamy white soup with mushrooms and onions and Rotel and everything and it's just a big variety of--of stuff that's here that's fluent and--and very prominent here in town that it just comes out awesome. It's delicious and you can buy it here in the store. You can take it home.

00:48:01

MBL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to comment on or do you have any final thoughts about your profession?

00:48:07

TP: Not really; buy more meat, eat more chicken, [*Laughs*]--if anything I mean you know--I say my thought is you don't have to go to a specialty place--you don't have to come to my store; try any of them. Let your--let--let your mind tell you what you want to look at and what you

want to see and try different ones, because I'm not saying I'm any better than anybody else down the street. They've--they've got some very good specialty meat shops around here. They've got some very good chefs and cooks out there; try it--try everything. And you're not going to like everything you put in your mouth but it's also nice just to give it a shot and see what happens and just--not really having any--any thoughts on it. Just try it out; eat more boudin, so we want to sell what we can.

00:49:01

MBL: All right; well thank you so much for sharing your time with me today.

00:49:04

TP: Thank you.

00:49:04

[End Tiny Prudhomme]