

GEORGE STEVENS
G&M Meat Market – Jeanerette, LA

* * *

Date: February 20, 2009
Location: G&M Meat Market
Interviewer: Mary Beth Lasseter
Length: 46 minutes
Project: Boudin Trail

[Begin George Stevens Interview]

00:00:02

Mary Beth Lasseter: Hello; today is Friday, February 20, 2009. This is Mary Beth Lasseter with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm in Jeanerette today doing interviews for the Boudin Trail. Could you please introduce yourself for me?

00:00:13

George Stevens: Yes; my name is George Stevens, the owner of G&M Meat Market in Jeanerette.

00:00:18

MBL: And where are you from Mr. Stevens?

00:00:20

GS: I'm born and raised in Jeanerette--all my life, 55 years--55 years I've been--it's hard to leave I guess. You know it's a town where Cajun culture is. And we're trying to keep it.

00:00:37

MBL: Tell me a little bit if you will about your family.

00:00:41

GS: My family well I grew up on the--outside skirts of Jeanerette and--and my grandmother and grandfather and all did Cajun culture. They raised their own animals and slaughtered their own

and--and I think that's probably where I picked up the tradition of doing it is you know from--
from being around them and them teaching us how to do it you know. And I guess it just sticks
through you, you know through your whole life. It's something you'll never forget, you know.

00:01:12

MBL: What are your grandparents' names and what did they--were they farmers for a living?

00:01:18

GS: Well no; they--they wasn't farmers. They worked in--in the fields for other--cane growers
but they raised their animals to--you know for survival. They raised pigs and cows and chickens
and--and every year we had--what Cajuns call boucherie where they'd slaughter a pig and--and--
or--or a calf or whatever to have food to last them you know for the season--just put it like that.
And then through the--through the course of you know the years you'd learn how to make the
Cajun products, the boudin and the hog-head cheese and cook the cracklings and you know it--
for them it was a matter of survival, you know. Today is an everyday--everyday culture.

00:02:01

MBL: For the record your grandparents' names, I'm sorry?

00:02:05

GS: Oh I'm sorry; Robert and Alice Stevens. They were born in--also born and raised in this
area and--and through the years they--they taught us a lot; they taught us a lot you know, so--.

00:02:17

MBL: And what was their family like? How many children did they have?

00:02:22

GS: They had six; they had six kids and--and my dad and--when my dad and my mom married they lived with grandma and grandpa so we were all raised in the same home. And like I said it was just--just grandma knew how to stretch things and how to make things work, you know for a large family like that you know so--.

00:02:46

MBL: Were both of your grandparents working out in the cane field or just your grandfather?

00:02:48

GS: Well my grandfather did and my grandmother did seasonally you know to help out you know 'cause things were back in the Depression days I guess it was pretty--it was pretty--money was tight, so--. [*Phone Rings*] Raising six kids I'm sure it took quite a bit. [*Laughs*]

00:03:03

MBL: Do we need to pause that so you can get the phone or--?

00:03:05

GS: Yeah; please. [**Recording paused briefly to answer the phone.**]

00:03:08

MBL: Now your grandparents, would you consider--your last name is Stevens; would you consider your family French Cajun?

00:03:15

GS: Oh yes, definitely, yes, yes; the French tradition carries on a long ways I'm sure. I don't even recall where they--their ancestors came from. They came from somewhere else you know but I don't quite remember where it was. I mean I probably was too young to remember but oh yeah; it's--it's Cajun--French Cajun heritage I'm sure you know to carry on this tradition you know, so--.

00:03:41

MBL: Did you speak French in your household when you were growing up?

00:03:44

GS: Did I speak French? Honestly no; I didn't. I tried when I was little but they laughed at me [*Laughs*] and I guess I got bashful and I didn't--I can understand a word of it--every, every word someone speaks to me but to speak it back, no; I don't. But they did constantly; you know my grandparents, my parents, they did speak French. I guess they didn't want us to know too much stuff, so--. But I tried I did and some words I can speak but you know I just--I'm too bashful I guess. [*Laughs*]

00:04:15

MBL: So was it--was French the primary adult language in the home; were they communicating to each other in French or only when they didn't want to hear--the kids to know?

00:04:21

GS: Well I think it was the primary language of the adults back then 'cause that's basically all they knew way back then, the--the French culture of speech you know. And I guess as we started school and--and say even my aunts and my uncles were going to school, there would honestly know English and you know--and that's where they--that's where it broke off at I'm sure you know, so--. But none of my--my brothers, my--or--or even my siblings speak French, a word of it; they took it in school but they don't speak it, you know to keep up the culture you know, so--.

00:04:55

MBL: Tell me about your siblings. How many do you have and where do you fall in the line?

00:05:00

GS: Well I--I--we have four brothers and one sister and I'm the twin--I'm a twin with the sister. We are the oldest ones and there's three brothers behind us you know. And I think--I think I'm the only one that picked up this culture, this trade, 'cause I guess maybe 'cause I'm the oldest one and they kind of expected me to do more than--than the little ones did at that time you know. But on the--on the days when we'd have a boucherie and stuff like that it was--it was a big thing for my grandfather to have everything prepared and ready for the slaughter of the pig and my job was to keep the water hot 'cause they had to pour hot water on the pig to scrape the hair off to get all the you know stuff off it, and once that was all cleaned and prepared then they could take--take the skin and the fat off of it to make the cracklings. That's how they would make the cracklings and stuff like that. So it--it was a big--big part in my life to learn how to do that you know to--to see how it was done way back then you know.

00:06:07

MBL: For people who have never been to one could you describe a boucherie and what that day was like?

00:06:12

GS: Oh it was an all-day event I promise you know an all-day event. You was up bright and early in the morning and--and we'd--we'd have all the neighbors and the relatives come by you know to come help out and naturally everybody would get a piece of the meat you know 'cause a long time ago that's how they--that's how relatives survived. One would kill a pig and then they'd divide it amongst everybody and two or three weeks down the road, the neighbor down the street would kill one or slaughter one and--and they would share that one 'cause I don't think there was refrigeration back then like we have today to where you can store things for months and months at a time, so they had to--to do away with it you know. And like I said it was more or less a sharing experience with everybody else. And but it started off early in the morning and killing the pig and--and--and dressing it out and the ladies would take the stuff they wanted to make boudin with and--and got that cooking and the rice was cooking and the--the men would be cooking the cracklings and cutting the meat up so they could wrap it up and--and distribute it out, you know that kind of thing.

00:07:30

And then--then they had some--they'd make little sausage and you know everybody would get some you know. So it was an all-day family affair; it was an all-day thing, so--.

00:07:39

MBL: Does that kind of thing happen around here anymore?

00:07:41

GS: None whatsoever, no, no; people--maybe a few people that--that live out in the country--ways might raise their own animals to slaughter but you--you don't see too much anymore; no. I think it's just something that's fading away 'cause there's so many supermarkets now where they can just go purchase some meat and have a little convenient meat market like we have here, where they can come and purchase meat and boudin and stuff instead of having to make a whole lot. They can just get whatever they desire, you know. So but I think it's--it's fading away gradually, you know.

00:08:20

MBL: Let's talk a little bit about how you got into this business. Give me a little history on that.

00:08:27

GS: Oh my goodness, how I got into this; well first of all I--I--I have another job. I drive a school bus. I've been employed with the Iberia School Board now for 23 years and in between that I would--I would work for other people in this type of work. And it got to the point where--where there was something missing here in Jeanerette, not--not even a meat market you know and--and I kind of knew the--the business in general. So my wife and I talked about it and decided to open something small and see how it would--it would work out along with the school bus you know thing going. And apparently that's--that's how I got into it you know and we've been here six years now and it's--it's growing every year, you know. It's--it's just something I--I love doing, you know. I learned it as a kid and it's just something I really love.

00:09:31

MBL: We were talking a little bit before the interview started about how you drove the school bus from this local town to another town and then sort of killed time during the day. Can you recount that for me?

00:09:40

GS: Well yeah; I drive--I drive from Jeanerette to New Iberia and--and of course I used to work for someone else in New Iberia also and I would park the bus across the street at the--at the local school yard and--and I would spend the whole day working, doing butcher work and--and helping to make boudin and stuff like that also. And then when it was time to come pick up the kids I'd--I'd pick them up and--and leave and that was a full day for me. I was gone all day long and--and I did my--my--my job and I was doing something I really you know enjoyed doing. And so like I said that's how we got into the--into the--into the meat market business here in Jeanerette you know and--and making boudin stuff and it just--it just--a way of life I guess if you want to call it that.

00:10:32

MBL: I gather you had your first experiences with *[Laughs]*--I gather you had your first experiences butchering at the boucherie, but once you--or seeing butchering but when you went to New Iberia did you apprentice under someone or how did you learn sort of the trade of butchering?

00:10:51

GS: Oh well in my--in my younger years I used to be an apprentice at the local shopping center here in Jeanerette at--at Robie's Food Center. And I worked under someone else to learn the butcher business and then I just got away from that. I did something else for a long time and I--I came back to it; it's like riding a bike, you never forget how to do it, you know. And--and it seems to be working well for me. And then I got involved into the school bus business also like I just said previously and that's how we decided to open up this business is 'cause it works so well you know. Believe me; sometimes I'm running around here like I'm crazy you know trying to get things prepared and things done you know. But it's--it's--it's from the heart.

00:11:47

MBL: Can you describe for me this business? Just describe the store for people who have not been in here and haven't seen it and--and give me a little bit of information on what y'all make and sell here?

00:12:00

GS: What we do here, okay; yeah it's not a very--it's a hole in the wall I call it. But anyway it--it works out fine. It's a little small portable building that we purchased and--and just turned it in--not knowing what to expect okay. But we--we make our own boudin of course and I do homemade hog-head cheese; we--I make cracklings here and--and the other lines we have rib-eyes and t-bones and we have stuffed pork chops and we do our own pork sausage and we sell like family packs of meat you know for some people that are on a budget or want to buy for a month's supply--that type of thing. And--

00:12:42

MBL: Who works here with you?

00:12:43

GS: It does--it really does. It--it works well and like I said we--we just enjoy what we do here, you know.

00:12:52

MBL: Who are your employees? Who do you have in the shop every day?

00:12:53

GS: Okay; I have my--my youngest daughter, Tandy she works with us and my cousin Chantel which does not want to speak on the microphone today but it works good for them too and--and--and they--they have time off. In fact, we--we're closed Sundays and Mondays. Most people want to know why I'm closed on Mondays but you know like I said being I drive the school bus I need a day off every now and then myself. So we close Sundays and Mondays and from Tuesday through Saturday it's just like nonstop for us, you know. It's just--we're just ripping and running all over the place. Sometimes they got to grab me and slow me down 'cause I'm going too fast you know. But for them too I think it works out good; they have time to spend with their families, you know 'cause they get every other weekend off, every other Saturday, so that gives them three days in a row to enjoy you know. I mean I'm not--we're not out to--to work anybody to death you know. Just we're just out here to make an honest living and--and it seems to be working.

00:13:55

MBL: Tell me a little bit about your customers. The people shopping here are they local or are they driving a--a distance to get here or do you know?

00:14:03

GS: Oh wow; yeah well the majority of our customers are local people. We have people come from New Iberia, Franklin, Centreville, Lafayette; we also have people come from New Orleans. In fact, yesterday we--a gentleman from Biloxi, Mississippi came by and picked up some boudin to bring home 'cause he had tried some. And we even have customers all the way from Houston, Texas. *[Phone Rings. Interview paused.]*

00:14:32

MBL: I should mention that we're doing this interview in the back of the store and so every now and then we're hitting the pause button so Mr. Stevens can go take care of customers. But you were just taking care of two or three folks who walked in. And let's resume this conversation with talking about the boudin. Tell me about how you make it.

00:14:51

GS: How I make it, okay; well--. Naturally we use the pork meat off the pork shoulder of the pig which has more of the *[Phone Rings]*--.

00:15:06

MBL: We'll pause. All right; so let's talk about the boudin--how you make it.

00:15:12

GS: Fine; we use the pork shoulder, which has more of--of a tender(er) meat to make the boudin we find and--and we do--we cook it down. In fact we boil it; we just boil it down for maybe an hour and a half or two hours. We cook a whole bunch of rice which is another Cajun product that we use. And then once it's all done--said and done, we grind up--a bunch of onions and shallots and green onion tops and that kind of stuff. We get all that prepared, ready and then we--we run the meat through the grinder, the onions through the grinder, and then we mix our seasonings. I use basically old time recipe seasonings, just plain salt. We use cayenne, red pepper, black pepper, garlic powder, that kind of stuff. I've been in--I've worked in places that use pre-mixed seasoning but I find it doesn't have the--the taste of the old-fashioned type boudin so that's why I went in that direction. And--and we mix it all up; we probably mix 150--200 pounds at a time in a batch and we stir it all up and mix it and get it all blended in all nice and gooey and then we--we run it through the casing. And the casing is--is--is a--a real pork product; it's not a synthetic material that we use. We use the real thing and--and in most cases, just like a minute ago, you can bite into it and the casing will--will break; it will cut. Sometimes it's--it's the crunchy type you know once you bite into it. Some people just like to peel it out of the casing or cut the casing open and eat the boudin itself. But I--I would imagine 90-percent of the customers eat the casing also which is--which is--you know once it's cooked properly and--and--. So we stuff it all up and--and refrigerate it and then as--as we need to--to heat it, we heat up 10 or 15--20 pounds at a time and we have a--a humongous gumbo pot in the back with a screen and we just--we just warm it. It's already cooked; it's already prepared. So it's--it's really not a real hard process; you know once you get the right ingredients and the right amount of seasoning and you find--. The customers will tell you what they like. Some will tell you well you could add a little more pepper and the people that really are not supposed to have it they want to eat boudin--can you make me

some with no pepper you know [*Laughs*] and--and I do. I do that for them, you know. I try to accommodate to the customers and I think they appreciate that. But it's just a plain basic simple--putting Cajun culture together you know.

00:18:00

MBL: You were saying you know you tweak your recipes and you do them to taste. Is there a particular kind of boudin that you remember that you're trying to make yours match or is it just what you like? Is it the spicy or--?

00:18:14

GS: Yeah; well usually it's just the--the taste I remember from growing up that my grandmother made and it's--it's not--some people--well some people think Cajun culture should be spicy--spicy foods and it's not true. Just so you have the right blend of seasonings to enhance your product, which makes it good you know--to me that's--that's what it's all about is just making sure it's--it's good for your customers to enjoy, you know. But so far it's been good; we--you know [*Laughs*], we've been in this business here six years and--and--and it's--oh God it's tripled, the--the amount of boudin that we make since we--since we started, you know. The first year we started we probably made a couple hundred pounds a week and now we're up to--a small thing like this maybe 800 or 1,000 pounds a week, you know just in this little building we're sitting in right here you know. But it's good you know for Jeanerette.

00:19:17

MBL: If you're making about 200 pounds let's say to a batch and you're doing 1,000 pounds a week, how often are you making the boudin? Is it an everyday task?

00:19:25

GS: It's an everyday task, yeah--every day; it's getting to where we have to make it every day now. And then even on the--on the days that I'm closed I'm in here making boudin to get prepared for the next week, you know. I'll make 200, 300, 400 pounds just to have prepared for when we open and like I said it's just a labor of love. I enjoy doing it; I really do. You know and I--I enjoy seeing the--the--the expressions on the people when they come in to get some and--and you--you--earlier we spoke about people from out of town come in to get boudin from Mississippi and Houston, Texas and all over, and you'd be surprised the people that want me to move over there where they live. *[Laughs]*

00:20:12

MBL: No doubt.

00:20:16

GS: Yes, indeed; yes. They really enjoy it. But they--they'll drive all the way from--I'm serious from Texas and Mississippi and all over and--and-- Well I--I imagine most of them were born and raised here in this area. They come home to visit mom and dad over the holidays and mom and dad introduces them to the little meat market and then the first thing you know they're bringing stuff back you know. And it's--every time they come, they'll call and let us know that we're coming; you better prepare--you know we--we're loading up so-- But it's--it's--it's a--a real honest and goodness journey that I'm in you know and I'm enjoying it, every bit of it.

00:20:55

MBL: Let's talk a little bit about the ingredients that you're using. Where are you getting your meats, your onions, your rice; is that stuff sourced locally or through a distributor?

00:21:04

GS: Yeah; through a distributor but it's mostly locally grown the rice and stuff. The green onions that--that I purchase I get from a local market. The--the meat products comes from a packing company out of New Orleans. Now days they--everything is all pre-packed and stuff, shipped by boxes; it's not like--. See back in the '40s and the '50s where they had you could see the meat man carrying a whole side of beef you know in the--in the market and stuff but everything is in boxes now so it makes it so convenient to--to purchase the things you honestly need instead of you know getting a whole pig and you don't need it you know. But it's--it's mostly locally grown stuff I'm sure that they slaughter and--and pack for us you know to give us the upper hand, so we don't have to do that. A long time ago the butchers had to slaughter their own animals and--and--and prepare all that and that was you know--. But now it's so convenient to do that you know, so--.

00:22:09

MBL: How do boudin sales compare to the other things that you sell here? What percentage of your business is boudin?

00:22:18

GS: Boudin--well boudin is probably about I would say 75-percent of my business, yes, you know. We do sell some meat products and--and other things but I--I think our--our biggest seller

is--is the Cajun products, the boudin, the hog-head cheese and that kind of stuff like that you know.

00:22:35

MBL: Are people buying it cold to go home and cook it or are they picking it up for lunch like I've seen a few people doing?

00:22:38

GS: Oh they'll pick it up for lunch; they'll pick it up for breakfast. They'll pick it up for dinner and in the evenings I promise you--but no, they--they like to get it hot ready to eat, so we keep, like I said we--we cook it in a--a big pot in the back with just some warm water just to you know--just to heat it up and we stick it in a big rice pot and it keeps it warm and when they come to pick it up it's done. Now some people traveling will take it cold; it--it preserves better that way you know and--and I kind of give them instructions on how they should heat it you know where they don't have a rice dressing 'cause the casing will bust if you boil it too long. And it will be just a rice pudding if you want to call it, but they--every time they come back they said you--you hit it right--you hit it perfect. You give me the right instructions so it worked out good. I even had a lady from Florida--that went to Florida, her son was getting married, and he requested to--to bring boudin from G&M Meat Market in Jeanerette for his wedding reception. And she said everyone loved it; they loved it. She bought 50 pounds in fact and served 50 pounds of boudin; that's a lot you know for a wedding you know. But he--she said oh everybody just adored it; they--they really loved it, so it was all good.

00:23:49

I like--I like--it gives me goose bumps on my arms when I you know--the--the nice compliments people give you, you know when you're doing something good.

00:23:59

MBL: Now boudin is a very labor-intensive food. How does that translate into the cost of it? What--what does boudin sell for?

00:24:07

GS: We sell it for \$3.39 a pound, you know. With the price of everything going up, naturally we had to go up along with it you know. The case--the price of the casing went up, the meat went up, the rice--even the ingredients, you know everything goes up you know. That--so far nobody complained about the price, so evidently they're getting their money's worth. **[Laughs]** So I--I kind of agree with it but price-wise, I think--I think they're getting a bellyful when they get a pound of boudin. **[Laughs]**

00:24:43

MBL: Without a doubt. Let's talk a little bit about eating boudin. If you're making it all day do you still eat it?

00:24:49

GS: Yes; we do. In fact, sometimes we'll run uptown to grab a burger or something and--and the customer will come--well, with all the good boudin y'all got here y'all eating something--? Well you can only eat so much in a week's time, you know. Just take that for granted, but yeah; we do. We eat--we'll--in fact we get some--there's a local baker shop up the street and they'll

bring us some hot French bread and we'll slice that up and put some boudin inside there and make a sandwich with it and it's--oh it's awesome. It makes a really good meal.

00:25:19

MBL: I saw the French bread on your counter. Can you tell me a little bit about that bakeshop?

00:25:22

GS: LeJeune's Bakery; they've been in business for over 100 years--over 100 years and--and the gentleman that's running it now, Matt and I, we are really good friends and they turn out a tremendous product also you know and it's all Cajun. Well it's Cajun French bread you know what I'm saying. But a lot of the--a lot of the people, local people that come they'll get a French bread and a pound of boudin or a couple of pounds of boudin and that's--that's their meal. That's what--that's what they're eating and so like I said, everything around here is--is Cajun culture.

00:25:53

MBL: I wanted to ask you about the location of this building. I know we're sort of jumping around in our conversation but I felt like I was driving through a neighborhood when I was getting here.

00:26:06

GS: Yes; yes.

00:26:06

MBL: So tell me where we are and how you ended up putting the business here.

00:26:09

GS: Well the business is here--we're--we're about two blocks off of Main Street. We're on Domingue Street and the reason I did it here is 'cause I--I purchased this property about nine years ago--ten years ago and--and looking to--to open a business, I didn't want--I didn't want to invest too--too much not knowing whether it was going, you know the turnout was going to be. And so I went to our local authorities and found out the limitations or if they had any restrictions or anything that would permit not to have a business right here on our property. In fact, the mobile home next door is mine also and we--we just set it here. And everything was a go, so we started shopping around and we found this little building that we're standing in, which is only 16-feet wide and 30-feet long, so it's not very big, but it--it serves our purpose.

00:27:07

So anyway we set everything up and we had the Fire Marshal come check it, the Board of Health people come check it and for--some people have a--a little problem finding us 'cause we're like I said two blocks off of Main Street. They'll go ride and sightsee through Jeanerette until they finally ask somebody. And then once they find us they come back; yes definitely they come back. And--and--and I guess it's my fault; I neglected--I had a sign at the end of the street but the kids broke it [*Laughs*] and I never--I neglected to put another one, so--. But nine out of ten people come from--calling from out of town getting directions. If they come in town and they're lost they'll call and we'll give them directions. And it's--they'll find their way. But that's how we wound up right here on Domingue Street.

00:27:51

MBL: Now you mentioned that the--the home next door is yours. Are you living here on the property with the business or you just put that there for storage?

00:27:59

GS: No, no; no, we were living here. The business has been here six years. We lived here--like I said, we purchased it 10 years ago not knowing we were going to do this and then two years ago we just purchased a home right up about a half a block up the street. So the trailer is vacant right now; so as soon as we finish getting our things out we're going to sell it and I want to expand-- I'm looking to expand a little bit you know maybe widen the building out and give us a little more work area--that kind of thing, 'cause like I said it's gradually increasing and getting better and better all the time, so we need a little more work area.

00:28:36

MBL: So you live and work within about a block of each other?

00:28:39

GS: I can walk to work; I'm serious, yes. I can walk to work honestly. And it makes it nice; it does. It makes it real nice. I can come to work at my convenience. Sometimes I'm here 2:00--3 o'clock in the morning preparing this stuff to open--before we open at 8 o'clock on like Saturday mornings. If my employee would talk to you she could tell you what time in the morning I come in but she won't speak. But sometimes it's 2:00--3 o'clock in the morning I'm--I'm in here preparing. It takes--for--for me to prepare a batch of boudin myself just me doing it by myself-- five hours of you know just nonstop getting things prepared and--and processing and cooling down and refrigerating and all that stuff before the customers start coming in. On Saturday--

‘cause Saturday from 8:00 to 12:00 it’s wild in here just in the--in a matter of four hours. We can push out a whole batch of boudin, 200 pounds in just that little while you know so sometimes I--. I guess knowing I have to come do it my eyes just pop open during the night. **[Laughs]** My eyes just pop open during--you know knowing I have to come in here.

00:29:47

But like I said it’s--it’s--it’s all--it’s good for me. I enjoy it; I really do.

00:29:53

MBL: Now do you normally make the boudin by yourself or do you have help? It’s a very manually labor-intensive job.

00:29:59

GS: It--it’s a 50/50 swap ‘cause sometimes if we have to make it like during--we made some yesterday in fact, just prior to you calling me yesterday. We just got through. They--they help me; they--they get all the seasonings chopped up and they get the rice cooked. I--I throw the meat in the pot and get it going and it--it’s just--we just know how to work around each other that way. But on--in an event if I come in from the school bus and they say look; you’ve only got 20 or 30 pounds of boudin left you know I’ll stay in here ‘til 8:00, 9:00, 10 o'clock at night and make it, not having to worry about it overnight and then I know I got to drive the school bus the next morning, so there’s no way I can get it started before then. So I’ll--I’ll do that; I mean I would. I don’t mind doing it you know. And many--many a nights I stay in here until 10:00--11 o'clock you know and it’s--it’s peace of mind for me, just knowing it’s done.

00:31:00

But I make a lot of it by myself; yeah just close the door and put the radio on and I'm good to go.

00:31:04

MBL: What do you listen to? Do you have boudin making music?

00:31:08

GS: No, not necessarily, just a little rock and roll thing going on here. [*Laughs*] But it's good; it's good. And my 12-pack of beer; [*Laughs*] I had to throw that in.

00:31:18

MBL: Is there a boudin beer of choice?

00:31:19

GS: Ah, Coor's Light; that's--that's mine yes exactly.

00:31:23

MBL: This sounds like not as much a job as a lifestyle that you've got going on. It's all-consuming; is that about right?

00:31:30

GS: Yeah; that's about right, yeah. I--I kind of look at it as a lifestyle for me you know. In--in the last six years I've just learned to adapt--of doing things that--that I need to do knowing that it has to be done. Before I--when I worked for someone else it didn't you know--I did my part and

then I left to go back on the school bus and whatever I left behind well they took care of it. But now I guess if you want to say it, the burden is on my shoulders and--and I take pride in--in what we do here and so I guess it--it--it kind of puts a strain on me a little bit just knowing you know sometimes they say why y'all sold all that boudin, you know? Well you--you don't want me to tell the customers no; they say, no, I'm just joking. But anyway you know we just--oh God we just made some and we'll be making some more again. It's amazing you know how--how the people just adapt to it.

00:32:28

And--and you'd be surprised; some mornings they'll come and load up on French bread and boudin and stuff. They're going to have breakfast somewhere; they're going to sit in the park or something you know. Or like in the summertime when the kids are out of school their mom will come in and get a couple of pounds of boudin and that's their lunch. I'm not cooking today [*Laughs*]; you know I mean it works out fine. And they--they really like it and even kids love it. The kids love it, you know.

00:32:54

Some of the kids--I don't know what they feed them at school if they don't have boudin but they really, really enjoy it, so--. Like I said it's--it's--it's--it's a blessing to me.

00:33:05

MBL: I know the store opened I guess fairly recently in the scheme of things for you. But is it--in the last six years as opposed to somebody who has been doing it for like 50 years is what I meant by that, but is it something you think that you'll continue with or maybe--I know you said your daughter works here; is it something that interests her?

00:33:24

GS: Oh I don't think so; no. But we kind of--I kind of joke around with them every now and then; we've been here six years and--and I'm looking to retire from the school system in about seven more years and then I'll be old. *[Laughs]*

00:33:42

MBL: What is the official age of old?

00:33:44

GS: Right now I don't know. *[Laughs]* I'm keeping that undercover. But anyway, no, right now I'm 55 and in seven years I'll be 62 and--and--and I guess I'll be 30 years on the school bus and I've worked just kind of worked all in between you know. So it's--it's a long time, so I kind of mentioned it to them when I go to the nursing home, I'll give them the recipes and then they can continue and my daughter said no; we're going to go and go pick you up and put your wheelchair behind the truck and bring you here. So I guess--it's just jokingly but no; I think I'm going to be here until I just can't go no more. I'll retire from the school system. But this is me; this is--oh God I love it. I really do. And--and just watching the--like I said, the expressions on some of the people when--when they come in you know. It's just amazing. You know it just makes you feel good, you know.

00:34:36

MBL: Well you seem to have a great rapport with your customers. People have come in and out all morning and you--you know them by name and you talk to them.

00:34:42

GS: Oh yeah; we--we keep a close contact on--on our people. And they--they enjoy that; they really do. Just go and chitchat with them a little bit and talk with them a little bit and--and they like that. They like that kind of you know communication with us and we enjoy seeing them come. You know what I'm saying? It's really, really good, so--.

00:35:04

MBL: Are there other meat markets in the area? I realize that--well I've seemed to realize that there are lots of meat markets in Louisiana, maybe more so than I've seen--or this part of Louisiana than I've seen anywhere else. Is--is that something common to Jeanerette; are there more of you out there?

00:35:21

GS: Well there's just one in Jeanerette. There was another one that closed probably about five years ago. It was down on Main Street, which you know it--in fact the people that had it before the Fitch(es) it used to be Fitch's Meat Market, they were in business like 50 years. And they finally retired and--and somebody else took it over for a little while but it didn't pan out you know for them. And--and with me opening here I don't know; they just kind of folded up a little bit I guess you'd want to call it that. But I wasn't out to hurt anybody; I was just out to make me an honest living but anyway, but Jeanerette didn't really--at this point in time just has one meat market. New Iberia might have four--three or four or five; I'm not sure. Franklin might have one or two, you know so it's--it's a common thing in South Louisiana, you know to have an over--over-the-counter meat market instead of you going into a supermarket and purchasing things that's been pre-packed or you don't know how long it's been there. Let's put it like that. And a

lot of people like to come and pick the one--the type of meat they want or they like to see you cut it for them and go out your way and--and really tend to their needs and--well they like that. You know what I'm saying?

00:36:43

And we also do like stuffed roasts and stuff like that for the holidays or--any--any time they need it and--and they really appreciate that, you know. Just take it out of the bag and drop it in a pot, you know. We season the rib-eyes for parties or kind of you know--we do all kinds of little things around here, not just the boudin thing but the boudin--our boudin is our main--our main source. That's what's keeping us going you know.

00:37:06

MBL: Is there a--a season when boudin is maybe more popular than another or is it a year-round thing?

00:37:11

GS: Well a lot of people have a tendency to back off on it in the summertime 'cause of--you know it's so hot outside you know. Wintertime well let's say October through January and February is a real good time for boudin you know. We--we find it is. But extremely during the holidays we can--we can make two batches a day sometimes you know. That's--you know the weather permits and families come in you know for the holiday season, especially Christmas and Thanksgiving and that kind of stuff like that. And they'll--they'll load up on--you know I always try to keep some available. I don't--I don't want to run out; I kind of tell them that's like the--the Pope not having Holy Water. You can't get your blessing if you don't have the right thing you

know [*Laughs*], so I just kind of make a little joke out of that. But they--they seem to enjoy it; they like it you know.

00:38:10

MBL: I want to back up and I didn't mean to miss this detail earlier when we were talking about your family; though we talked about your grandparents and your parents. Can you tell me a little bit about your family and your children?

00:38:20

GS: My children, I have two daughters; Dusty is the oldest one and Tandy is the youngest one. In fact, Dusty worked here a little while, prior moving from Arkansas back home and then she found another job elsewhere where she's more comfortable which is fine. And then Tandy lives right next door, so she comes to work late. I'm going to let you know that. You can print that on the--on the thing [*Laughs*]. And but no; she's--she's a sweetheart. Both of them are in fact, and--but Tandy--Tandy has been here since the day we opened--since we opened. And when we first opened up we--we'd have to close in the evening so I could go do my bus route 'cause I didn't want to leave her by--alone you know. And so--and then when I'd come back then I'd reopen and hold it open 'til 6 o'clock and now we close at 5:00. [*Laughs*] I need that hour. But it--it got to the point where you know it--it was--it was a lot of hours for me. So we backed off a little bit and we went to 5:30 and now we're closing at 5:00 which is a good time.

00:39:23

But the two girls seemed to enjoy it, my--my two daughters when they were working together over here. And then when--when my oldest daughter quit then I hired my little cousin and she knows a little bit about the meat business. She worked in a supermarket before and--and

everybody seems to get along wonderfully--wonderfully. Everybody knows their part; everybody does you know what needs to be done and--we get it done. We get it going.

00:39:49

MBL: Now what are the hours of the store and what are the hours of your bus route?

00:39:51

GS: Oh wow; the bus route, I leave at 6:15 in the morning and I don't arrive to my last school until 8 o'clock. And then from school to here I open here at 8:30 in the morning. And we close at 5:00 Tuesday through Friday. Saturday we're here from 8:00 to 12:00 and like I said in the afternoon I leave here around 2:30 to go do my afternoon route and my daughter and my cousin is here to wait on the customers and keep them happy.

00:40:25

MBL: Now where is the school bus? I don't think I saw it parked outside?

00:40:28

GS: No; it's not here. I leave it--luckily they let me park it at the school, at St. Joseph's School close by, so I just take my--my vehicle and I go meet the bus, so that's how that works out. I just don't have room to be able to park it around here, so but I'm blessed they let me leave it over there, being I serve the school you know. And I bring them boudin on occasions and they love that. *[Laughs]* They love it; my goodness, yes.

00:40:49

We have trouble going anywhere I'm serious. Yes; we've got trouble going to put gas in our vehicles or even running to the local Dollar Store; you didn't bring no boudin? They always tell us that. I went to--even--even for our school bus drivers meetings, I'll go to the meeting and some of the ladies will come, George; you could have brought me a couple pounds of boudin and a bag of cracklings. I would have paid you for them. I mean well I didn't know I was supposed to bring it; you didn't call and tell me. Or, I even deliver on the bus sometimes, you know. They'll call me look; drop this off at a certain school and I'll pick it up and you know that kind of thing, so I do school bus delivery also. I don't know if you want to print that; my boss might see it.

[Laughs]

00:41:37

MBL: We'll keep that under wrap.

00:41:40

GS: Yeah; we're doing great, great.

00:41:41

MBL: Question just went out--oh, I was going to ask; do you ever--you say you deliver it to people who want it. Have y'all ever served you boudin at festivals or--or sold it to people who served it to the public or is the only place you can get your boudin right here in this store?

00:41:54

GS: Well basically it's--this is the only place; yeah. A couple of people have approached me about selling them some boudin to sell at their facility and I just didn't like the idea of it to tell

you the truth 'cause that's a long story. I don't know if you've got all day, you know. **[Laughs]**

Anyway but no; this is the only place. The festivals, nobody approached me about it yet, you know. The little St. Joe fair is coming up soon so I'm waiting for them--'cause my little grandson goes to school there so they go well maybe Dustin's grandfather will give us a cut you know and let us purchase some boudin. But no; it--this is the only place you can honestly get our stuff--our boudin.

00:42:43

MBL: Now is your wife involved in the business?

00:42:47

GS: She comes on occasions you know. She works elsewhere; she has another job. And she--she threatens to come to work here every now and then. **[Laughs]** But no; it--it would be a blessing to have her here, you know to have an extra time sometimes but she's just the type--she likes to stay home and I don't mind that. She--she needs the rest; she works as hard as I do I promise.

00:43:11

MBL: Well as we wrap this interview up is there anything you can tell me about boudin that I haven't asked or maybe you can sort of describe your ideal boudin--like it spicy, you like it mild?

00:43:26

GS: Oh I like it all. I prefer it kind of mild--medium on the seasoning to where you can enjoy it; you can taste it. I've eaten boudin to where it was so peppered you had to drink something right behind it. You--you couldn't get a taste you know. You don't know what you were eating honestly you know and I've eaten some that could have used more. But I've tried them in different places. I've even had some people bring me some boudin from different areas that so claimed they were *the best*, you know and personally I didn't--I didn't care for it. So I guess that's why I--I--I experimented with mine and--and finally got it to the point where I was completely satisfied. It tasted what I remembered as a child; it tasted something like my grandmother used to make. You know what I'm saying? It kind of just brought that memory back and it's--it's--I'm going to give you some before you leave anyway.

00:44:29

MBL: Oh--.

00:44:32

GS: But anyhow, it--it just--it's--it's a taste to where it's not--the seasoning is not overpowering. You can taste it; you can enhance the flavor but it's not where you--you don't enjoy it you know and--and I don't know. It's just some people have that--that--like I said earlier that thing about Cajun food should be a burner, you know. No, no; it's not true. You can enjoy food; you can enjoy boudin especially and--and it's--it's a wonderful product and I'm--I'm glad I got involved in it you know. I had no intentions of doing this I'm serious. **[Laughs]** But one of my--well I talked about my--my brothers; one of my younger brothers passed away a few years ago and he was--man let's open us a business. Let's you and I open us a business. And I had no intentions of--of doing it. And poor soul he--he passed away of cancer at a young age of

44 years old. And I guess it was his dream; I don't know 'cause sometimes I feel him in here with me you know when I'm by myself. It's got to be him, you know so--.

00:45:44

MBL: That's a good note to end it on. Thank you so much for sharing your time with me today; I appreciate it.

00:45:49

[End George Stevens Interview]