

RICHARD ELLIOTT
Sunset Specialty Meats—Sunset, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 59 minutes
Project: Southern Boudin Trail

[Begin Richard Elliott-Boudin Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Sunday, September 9, 2007. And I'm in Sunset, Louisiana, with Richard Elliott. Could you say your full name for me and your birth date, and also tell me the name of your store?

00:00:18

Richard Elliott: My name is Richard Elliott. My birth date is July 19, 1960. And my store is Sunset Specialty Meats in Sunset.

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SR: And I just asked you before we started recording if Elliott was a Cajun name, and—and can you tell me how you answered?

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RE: No, not actually. My—my side of the family is from the North Carolina—either North Carolina or the Texas side—my mama's side.

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SR: And how did you wind up in this area?

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RE: My daddy was in the oil field, so he kind of—we kind of bounced around, and we ended up in South Louisiana—you know, came down here, and I was a graduate from Acadiana High at about—on the other side of Scott. And I've been in the grocery business since.

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SR: So you started in the grocery business right after high school?

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RE: Right. While I was in high school, since I was a freshman. I always worked in the grocery business, and from that I went from that into the old Delchamps [grocery store] building when Delchamps first came to Louisiana—and from Alabama is where they came from. And then I stayed with them for about seven, eight years, and kind of went offshore for a couple years. I took over my grandfather's restaurant in Texas for—for about a year or so and then came back and worked for Albertson's for 18 years. And from that I bought this.

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SR: So I'm curious, before I start asking you about Albertson's, what kind of restaurant did you run in Texas?

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RE: It was a steak and seafood [*Coughs*—excuse me—I'm going to have to get some water.

00:01:58

SR: All right, you were talking about the restaurant in Texas?

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RE: Right. I took over from my grandfather's restaurant, which was in Brownwood, Texas. He had a seafood and steakhouse that he started from a little—about a 12 on 12 building—and it ended up being a big outfit out there. But I helped him, and then when he wanted to retire I went out there and did that and learned a lot from him, and it just didn't work out. My wife was pregnant at the time and homesick, so we ended up coming back home.

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SR: And so your wife is from this area?

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RE: Oh yeah, she was born and raised in this area. And she was--I think she was born in Many—Winnie, Texas. And then, but she was raised all in South Louisiana all of her life.

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SR: And so were there other people in your family in the food business, or is—was your grandfather an inspiration, or was it just happenstance that you wound up in grocery?

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RE: It just happened I was in grocery. Yeah, I mean he was the only one in food business other than myself. My family has more been in the oil business.

00:02:52

SR: Yeah. And tell me what you did with the Albertson's company for 18 years.

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RE: Well I started out as a lobby manager, and from there I went to the grocery manager, which was in my field—between grocery and meat department. I was a market manager for Delchamps, and then I ended up being a grocery manager for them, and then from that I went back into the meat department. And I was a meat market manager for them for the last seven years, so I was pretty much in the meat department for at least eight, nine years. And then—and with Delchamps I was in the meat department for I think about, probably five out of the seven years I was with them. And then—and just always been in it since then. You know I've always cooked. I've always did catering jobs, did festivals, just—always have done it. It was just money in it, you know, at the time. It's just, vegetables is always a neat—a neat and different type of food, but I mean it's something that's enjoyed by everybody.

00:03:51

SR: So what kinds of things would you cook for festivals?

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RE: Festivals are done with you know—I have a fryer so we have boudin balls, and then we do barbeques with the pork chop sandwiches and pork steaks, hamburgers, and I make a jambalaya. I got the black pots and—and then we have the cracklings. When we go to the Cracklin' Festival,

that's what the main thing is: cracklings and boudin and the boudin balls. We cook the boudin on the pit so it kind of gives it a smoke flavor at that point too. I would do smoked boudin over at the store, but it—it's a Board of Health issue, because you got to keep time and temperature and all kinds of other stuff going on at the time, so it's just better off that we don't mess with it.

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SR: I know a lot—that's how a lot of people treat their boudin at home, is on the barbeque.

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RE: Yeah, it's the easiest way to do it. The best way is just to boil it, but I mean it—it's a real hot product at that point, but to barbeque it is a different taste totally. So and it is almost a better taste, because of the smoke flavor.

00:04:51

SR: Yeah, I've had a lot of boudin makers tell me that. I guess it's kind of too bad that you can't get it in a store. Well tell me what prompted you to buy this and get out of the chain grocery business.

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RE: Well it's like anything else: you always want to be your own boss, so and it—and that was the main issue. I had the experience; I had the opportunity to do this at the time, and it just worked out, and it—it just, one thing led to another and it just happened that way. That's how the big boys become big boys, starting out small and then getting up bigger.

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SR: What about, we were talking earlier about how different this operation is from, say, the meat counter at Albertson's or at Wal-Mart because at—in most of those stores they aren't actually cutting meat on-site.

00:05:45

RE: Yeah, absolutely, they—over here you can actually see your meat being cut. I mean, I'm not enclosed where you can't see the meat cutter, and it's fresh. We still do some box meat; I get calf in. But at Albertson's everything is boxed beef. Most of the time it's not, you know—ground beef is pre-packaged, like at Wal-Mart. And it's coming to that, but only because of a labor issue, where everything sooner or later will be cut and boxed and all you got to do is take it out and—buy it. And it's just with the trend with the young people who want something right then and there. They don't want to wait or—or anything else to do with like that. But you know, when you buy something from Wal-Mart like that, you know it's cut at a long period of time so they've had—it's had to be gassed. It's only preservations—other than chemically put into a meat, and it just—that's the easiest way right now, is to gas it up. And then it's like, I don't know if you've ever noticed when you buy a piece of meat from Wal-Mart or—or I don't know if Wal-Mart is the only one doing it these days, but when it's gassed up like that, you take it out and you bust that pack open and within two days that meat is going to be dark and brown, you know. It could be dark and brown coming from me too, but it's going to be a little bit longer life—shelf-life on it. But when you buy something here it's going to be fresh, and you know sometimes fresh ain't always good if you don't cook it right away also, you know. I mean fresh—you can

buy fresh chickens; I have ice pack chicken, but ice pack chickens doesn't hold up as long as Miss Goldie's or something like that because of all the preservations in them, you know—the ingredients, all the chemicals that they put in and stuff like that. Everything you get here is fresh.

00:07:23

SR: What does that mean, ice pack chicken?

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RE: It's just a fresh—a totally fresh chicken straight from the plant on ice, you know. The ice plants put extra ice on it; when it gets here we end up still having to put ice on it because if—if they just sit in open cold air they go bad, you know. There's no, you know, preservatives in it—nothing to preserve it for a longer period of time other than ice. You've got to keep it ice cold.

00:07:48

SR: And so were you—when you said earlier that places serving fresh meat cut on the premises will go—won't be around much longer, did you mean places like this? You think that—do you feel like this is going to die out?

00:08:07

RE: Sooner or later it's got to. It just—because of the labor issue. There is—meat cutters are a dying breed, and only places like me or in places that are around like me are the only ones to train the young guys, because these bigger guys will not—won't take people in to train. They got to have people right then and there, so it's only people like me—it's like I keep a person no more

than six months to a year and he's moved on, because they got bigger guys that's going to pay him \$10 or \$12 an hour—excuse me—. And you know little guys like us can only pay \$7, \$8. We keep a regular guy that's about \$10, \$12 an hour, but it's—it's a labor issue all the way around. I mean when you can buy packaged meat cheaper than I can have a calf come in and cut it and pay a man back there and—and still have to get a higher price than you can buy something that's pre-packaged, there's always an end to something you know. So, and that's where it's going. I, you know I hate to see it that way but it's—sooner or later in the years to come you won't see a meat cutter.

00:09:05

SR: Hmm. Where did you learn to cut meat? Was that part of your job in—at Albertson's?

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RE: No, actually I learned it at Delchamps. I had a guy that took me under his wing and—a fellow by the name of Al Doucet. He's—he was a meat cutter at that point and a market manager and kind of took me under his wing and taught me and you know, I actually relieved him when he left as the market manager at—at Delchamps, so—. And we had, at that time we were cutting calves for a short period of time, and then they went away when I was a market—when I got there, and I didn't learn as much as I'd like to have learned. You know, where the cuts of meat actually come from, because now when boxed meat comes in you can take it straight out of the package and cut—just start cutting steaks, you know. It's just—it's that easy now to become a meat cutter, but you still got to have some kind of experience. I mean you can—they got it broken down where you buy rib-eyes here, chuck steaks here, a rib—t-bones here you know, just

cut—they come right out of the box and start cutting it, you know, with a little—with a little trim. And you even got ground beef now. It comes in tubes where you grind—ground beef, because it says it's ground beef. You don't have the trim coming off to make your ground beef like the old days did, you know.

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SR: Do you ever get whole calves or whole hogs in here instead of the boxed meat, to sell retail?

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RE: Sure, that's what I have. I have calves—I have calves that come in and I have—I don't do so much on the pork because it's just so much easier to get pork like it needs to be. You know it comes vacuum-packed two or three pieces to a thing, and you just can get it and cut it. It's just too easy. It's like anything else: the easier thing it is the less labor you have—you know that's what you're going to bring in. And—and when you don't have to pay a \$12-an-hour guy back there to cut meat, you can have a \$7 guy there just to put out and be a stocker, you know—why not? And with nobody around to do it, or demanding that they get paid \$18 an hour because there's nobody else to do it, well the issue comes down to—yeah, yeah, you got—you got to go with the times.

00:11:06

SR: And so when you decided to buy this place and leave the chain grocery, was it—was part of the appeal having fresh meat or—? I mean I know that it was a business decision; you wanted to work for yourself, but you chose a store that's, you know—has a specialty.

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RE: Yeah, I guess in a sense—I think the main issue is to be my own boss. I mean it's like any other big companies. There's always—there's always somebody higher up that's got something to say or tell you to do, or you know—. And I don't—I don't say nothing bad about it 'cause it sure supported my family for 18 years and got them through school and paid for my house and my cars and—and my trips and everything else. I don't knock any big organization; it's just that one day in your life you always wish to be your own boss. And when I worked for my grandfather in Texas with the restaurant and everything, you got to—when you get a taste of it you never forget it. So, and—and when you sell something and have to go back to it it's really difficult. It's really hard to work for somebody else.

00:12:12

SR: Well, can you tell me a little bit about your boudin business here? I know that they were making boudin here before you came. Did you just adopt their recipe, or develop your own, or how did that work?

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RE: Well it seems like everybody has got their own recipe for boudin, and it was—when I took it over there was a—there was a market manager here at the time, and he had his little recipe that

he took from the recipe that was here before that man, and from that man from that man. It's all traced down and everybody has got a better recipe. And it's like when—when the market manager that was here left, I kind of—I kind of implemented my own little recipe from that point, you know, and I did more natural stuff. I added more celery. I added more natural peppers. I added more onions, bell peppers. I did the natural thing on it more than anything—than I did the unnatural—and the only thing that's not natural is the MSG that I got in it, and you really can't afford not to put MSG in products now because it just—it's a flavor enhancer. It just brings out all the stuff that you're trying to make come out even more, you know. And that's what it's all about, is trying to get more flavor. Now you can over—you can overkill the MSG. A lot of people do, but I only put enough in there to—to bring out those flavors.

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SR: And when you say natural peppers, did you mean hot peppers?

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RE: Yes, cayenne peppers. You know I get it from Targil, and sometimes that changes your recipe from time to time because they don't always get—the different cayenne peppers, because you can see it in the color, it's a different pepper each individual time you get your seasoning. So, but I mean it's something that they have no control of, you know. It's—peppers are grown yearly, so I mean it's not every—peppers ain't going to be the same from year to year, you know. And I have a friend that works at the Tabasco plant out there, and he goes overseas to check on his peppers every year, you know, and—and it's different.

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SR: I think that you might be the first person I've talked to that uses the fresh peppers. Do you think that—what kind of a different flavor does that bring to the boudin, [rather] than just like dried cayenne pepper?

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RE: Well it's a dried cayenne pepper, don't get me wrong, but it—it's grinded. It's different. It is different, you know, but it's in addition to the powdered pepper, and it does give it a little bit of flavor. It's kind of—it's kind of like bay leaves, you know, to a product: it doesn't look like that little leaf can change the taste of something, but it does.

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SR: But you mean—I'm sorry, I'm not understanding. Is—do you get the cayenne peppers whole and dried, or ground?

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RE: Both.

00:14:39

SR: Okay, okay, right. So the fresh peppers, you get them dried—you get them dried?

00:14:44

RE: It's a cayenne pepper, and it's a dried cayenne pepper.

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SR: Yeah, I still haven't had anybody tell me that they do that. Maybe they do. But that's interesting. What about, what kind of rice do you use? What kind of grain?

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RE: It's a medium grain. We don't use a long grain. We like the medium grain.

00:15:03

SR: And how about the pork? What—what form is that in?

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RE: Most of the time I like to mix a butt—a Boston butt roast and a picnic roast, and—because the picnic is a whole different flavor than a Boston butt, so between the two of them it gives—it gives it a different flavor also. A lot of people just put butts; some people just put picnics. Some people mix it. I mean it's so many different ways that you can do things and it—and every way alters the taste, and everybody has got their own—everybody has got their own thing and they've got the best. So you know, when I say I got the bestest, I got—I say I got the bestest. I don't say I got the best; I say I got the bestest. So it's just one of those issues where you know your product is good, and everybody else's is good too. It's just a matter of the area you're in. You know you go a little bit further north or a little further south, it may be hotter, it may be more milder. When you go to North Louisiana, they can't handle the hot seasoning so you got to back it off.

Sometimes I make it for people up in Texas; they—they like it really hot. But people in North Louisiana can't take the heat, so I got to—I got to blend it down.

00:16:02

SR: So you do custom orders?

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RE: Definitely do custom orders, you know. I have—I have several people from North Louisiana come in; I have people from South Louisiana. I mean the further South they come I'm—I'm getting more known than normal, but you know it's taken three years to—. You know I get people from out—you know you got other boudin makers, and right in their area, but they prefer to come here. But to each his own. Everybody's got a different taste.

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SR: Can you tell me on the animal what the difference is between the picnic cut and the Boston butt?

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RE: It's just a little lower; it's lower on the shoulder. But the picnic comes with the skin, and that's grinded with it. So you got that skin flavor, and that's where the flavor comes in. The picnic is a little bit leaner too. The Boston butt has a lot of marble in it—little more fat in it, so that kind of gives you the—not so much of a dry taste. And the butts will also give it a—a stringy taste too, and a lot of that varies in the way you grind it. You know you've got different

holes—different sized holes that you can grind. Some people like it small; some people like it—I like a medium hole, you know, just the way—you don't want a big gob of—. When you take a bite, you know you don't want that big chunk of meat—a lot of people, you know. But then some people do like that. You know, you just can't satisfy everybody. Everybody has got a different taste.

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SR: Yeah, I did notice just—I'll say for the record that when I tried yours yesterday, it had a really rich flavor. I wonder if—I don't know. How—what would you say accounts for that? Do you use liver in yours?

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RE: Definitely. It's—it's like a small part of liver. I don't use near as much as a lot of people use the liver in it 'cause I don't—personally don't like the liver taste. But a lot of people do like the liver in the boudin, and some people believe that's the main ingredient in it, and you can taste the difference when it's not in there. If I have run out and they didn't worry about it and they just didn't make it with liver, I can tell it, but it does give it a different taste. But I don't put that much in there.

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SR: And what do you think—when you were developing the recipe that I guess you inherited, and then you changed a little bit—what were you going for? What do you think that your end

result—how is it different from other boudin? What do you think the best characteristics about it are?

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RE: Well and—and then again it depends on each—each people who make their own boudin. I find that the smaller amount of boudin you make a time, the better off it is. If you use the same recipe each and every time it's better too, and—and a lot of people say they use the same recipe every time, but they actually you know—you got different people that are making it. And like I just had a guy I hired two weeks ago. It's—it's taken him seven, eight times of making it before he's got it down, you know. It's—it's a knack to it; it's like anything else. It's like cracklings: it's all about sight, smell, feel. Even though you have a recipe, until you get it down to where it needs to be it's going to be different when the new guy takes it over, and that's where a lot of businesses go wrong. When they hire a new person they just assume that he goes by the recipe—not always happening you know. Seasoning is a big factor, and when you get seasoning in it's mixed by somebody else more—most of the time. Sometimes people make their own mixture, but most of the time somebody is buying that seasoning, and it's mixed by them and mixed—. You know you have maybe a little more salt in that one than—than in your last batch or something, and it affects everything. That's why boudin is not always consistent. And a lot of people say, *Well it was good last time but not good this time*. Well it's—it's a lot of factors in that. It's just not one person making it. It's not just one person getting the seasoning. It's just—it's a lot of factors in it, and there's a lot of processing that goes on with boudin and cracklings that it—sometimes it's not just one person is involved in it, so that one person may be off a little bit, and it doesn't seem like it makes a difference but it does. You know the smaller amounts you

make, I think the more consistent you can be with the boudin. The larger batch that people—once they get big and they start making these bigger vats of boudin and stuff, it affects it.

00:20:06

SR: Uh-hm. Oh, I wanted to ask you how often you make the boudin, and how much would you estimate you make per week?

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RE: Well we usually make boudin every day. With it hot like it is, we might miss once or twice a week depending on the sales. I do a small amount and that's—that's about average of about 100 to 150-pounds a day, you know. I'd say 150—I'd say 160 because we make it in intervals of 100. You know it starts out at 60-pounds; by the time you add your rice and everything, it comes up to about 100-pounds. So you're looking at about 200 pounds on two batches. Now I mean that varies from—from day-to-day, you know. It really depends on the sales. Now when winter gets here, sometimes we can make two and three batches a day, you know, and with the water stuffer like it is, it's real easy to make. I mean once it's—once it's cooked and grinded and processed and everything, it's you know—it don't take long to put it on the casing and run it out; because the longest time it takes is for the chill-down factor, you know, and it's the next day before you can really use it, you know—after it's chilled down—or it's about the time your store is closed. If you had a 24-hour store, then it wouldn't be an issue, but it's a chill-down factor once it's cooked and everything.

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SR: So you can't sell it right after it's cooked?

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RE: No, you actually got to cook the casing again, you know. If you try to eat it right after it's—it's kind of—it's not a water paste form, but it is a—a thinner base than what it is after it's chilled down a little bit. It's like anything else that's cooked with a little grease in it: once you chill it down, it firms up a little bit more. And then it's reheated, but then it doesn't—when it reheats, for some reason it don't, you know—you don't have that water base back. It's—it's a uniform base; it's just not a water base like the one you start out with when you put—when you put it in the casing.

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SR: So you put it in the casing, and then you cook it—. Okay, you put it in the casing and then you chill it down—?

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RE: Yeah, more or less. You know, it's [the pork] got to be cooked first. Then you grind it and you add your—back in—'cause you cooked it with all the natural ingredients, and then you're taking and letting it [the pork] drip-dry with all the ingredients, and then you grind it. And then from the grinder you take and mix it with your rice, and then after that then you add your fluids back into it from all your flavorings. And then we re-season the water again, and we add it back to the—the boudin, which gives it the water base. And from that point we put it in the water [hydraulic] stuffer, and from that it goes into the casing, which is why I say you know it's—it's a

water—it's not a loose water form, but it's not a firm, you know. And some people can—you can make it as firm as you want but to me it's just better; it's a water form. It's got more flavor in it at that point, and when you mix it in dry—to me that's not much flavor in that. You've got heat. You don't have flavor. You have heat and that—to me that makes—there's where the difference is in boudin: is it rich in flavor, or is it rich because it's hot? And you don't taste nothing but the rice and the casing and the heat, 'cause after that point all you need is a Coke, you know, to wash it down.

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SR: And so okay. So it's stuffed and then cooled. You can't just stuff it and then cook it right away?

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RE: No, it's not wise. It's got to cool down some, because if not it's just going to run out. It—it will be too soft.

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SR: Okay. How much a pound is your boudin?

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RE: Right now it's \$2.89 a pound.

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SR: And we were talking yesterday when I stopped in about how there's not a lot of profit in cracklings. What about boudin? Is that a little profitable for a store like this?

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RE: Boudin is very profitable. I mean you—you're talking anywhere from 60 to 100-percent profit.

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SR: Because it's not as labor intensive?

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RE: Not so much that; it's just that pork is cheap, and that's all you're putting in it. You're not putting beef in it. You know probably the most expensive thing about—about that is the casings. Casings are getting where it's pretty expensive. I think for—for a hank of casing, it's now like \$12-bucks for 10 or 12 hanks of casing, and it's climbing. You know it used to be a quarter of that price, and now everybody is making sausage and boudin and stuff like that; it moved up the price on it. And I don't know if there's any other issues that I don't know about in that, but and it's like anything else—everything is just climbing. So you know, to each his own on that. Whoever has got that going on is making money, that's all I can tell you, 'cause I mean all that is—is casings and salt.

00:24:41

SR: Right. Can you tell me—we were talking yesterday a bit about how much more complicated it is to make cracklings. And can you tell me what the challenges of making cracklings are?

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RE: Well I guess the challenge in that is to having the same person do it, you know. It's like I was saying before: it's all a labor issue when it comes to cracklings 'cause that's—that's strictly something you learn. I mean that's a nose deal; that's an eyesight deal, and—and just the smell. It really does. I mean you can cook cracklings; each time it's going to cook different because every box is going to cook different, because the guy from the beginning didn't cut them to the right size; they were bigger or smaller. The grease breaks down, and like I was telling you yesterday they—the grease is only good four or five times, and then you got to change it out because like anything else, grease breaks down. And as grease breaks down you—it takes longer or less or—. We cook cracklings twice, so if somebody cooks cracklings the first time and cooked them a little bit too long, well you don't cook them as long the next time. Well it—it's just something that's got to be seen. It's—it's all by eyesight and smell, because once you smell it and it goes just about a minute too long, well it's finished. It's—you just as soon throw them in the trash. And you know you're talking about \$60 a case. Yeah, it—it's expensive to—and \$60 a case, and you come out with half a case when you cook them, you know. That's why cracklings are \$9 and \$10 a pound, because there's just—there's no profit in it. You know you'd have to do an abundance of cracklings and—and there again it's—well now is this really worth it? Because then you got to pay somebody to cut and cook it and everything else down the road. And it's all—everything else. It's a labor issue, like everything else around us these days. It's labor

issues—labor and pay, you know. That’s why it’s going to all come down to the consumer where they got—that’s why they got to pay \$10, \$12 a pound for this stuff. But it’s full of cholesterol, so they either pay me or they pay their heart doctor. One of the two. **[Laughs]**

00:26:40

SR: Not the healthiest food.

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RE: No, it’s definitely not. I mean if you would see how it clogs up drains, you would see how it clogs up your arteries because it—it is really bad. I mean in the—in the summertime we don’t have a problem, but in the wintertime when it’s cold it clogs up a four-inch pipe with no problem.

00:26:59

SR: Do you eat cracklings now that you make it?

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RE: I have—I eat it only because I try them to make sure the guys are doing their job, but I try not—I try to stay as much as far away from them as possible ‘cause I see what it does. It’s just full of—it is just—it amazes me how the old people lasted as long as they did that had lived on this stuff, because I mean—and they really did. I don’t know if it’s preservatives these days for the younger generation, but I know we won’t live that long eating that stuff. **[Laughs]**

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SR: And do you—do you start with pork belly?

00:27:30

RE: Yes, I use pork bellies. Some people just use a—they call it backfat, which is just fat and the—and the skin. And you can get away with that too, but I like—a lot of people like the meat, and it's a better crackling with—with the meat. And, but I mean for years and years it was all backfat, and everybody ate that you know.

00:27:51

SR: I guess maybe they were using the meat for something else when they were starting from the whole hog.

00:27:55

RE: Bacon, 'cause it is bellies. That's what it actually is. They use—they use it for the bellies, and that's what it's called when you—when you go buy those bellies and not—you can't get it everywhere, you know. I don't know anywhere else than Prejean's here in Carencro that carries it. I got people that come from North Louisiana that can't get it, you know, unless they kill their own hog. They just—they—the companies use it for bacon, you know, and there's not much use for it other than in South Louisiana or people who do cracklings. Which is, I don't know—in the South, I mean, where else it's done, but I know in South Louisiana it's probably the most popular area [for cracklings] I would think.

00:28:34

SR: So I saw one of your employees yesterday cutting up the pork bellies with the saw. And then you cooked them twice in the grease. Can you explain to me why you cooked them twice?

00:28:47

RE: Just the process. And after you—if you cook—if you cook this stuff outside it cooks totally different. Cooking it inside—don't know why it does it. There's no explanation for it, but you cook it out in a festival or something like that, you can cook it once and it comes out just perfect. You can cook it once. It can be done this way too [inside], but it just—it's more of a chewy and hard crackling when—if you don't cook it twice. So that's why I say it's got to pop. The crackling itself has got to pop, and when you cook it the first time it gets a little—it gets a little pop, but then it gets too crunchy. So when you take it from that point and you cool it down, and then you come back and get the grease at a certain temperature and drop those cold cracklings in there, it's like anything else—it pops. Kind of like popcorn. And—and when it pops then you got—you got a perfect crackling.

00:29:37

SR: And do you season your crackling at all?

00:29:40

RE: Oh definitely. We do both salt and seasoning. Sunset Specialty Meats—I have my own seasoning, and it's all natural stuff too: salt, pepper, paprika; there is a little MSG in it. I cut back a lot in the MSG in my regular seasoning, but it's more—more natural seasoning in it than

anything. And that's what we use on our cracklings, and they're not—we started this past year just doing salt 'cause a lot of people wanted just salt on their cracklings, and that's been a big pretty good hit too. So we do half a box in seasoning and half a box in salt every time we do a box.

00:30:14

SR: The older people, do they like just the plain salt or have—have people been seasoning cracklings with other things for a long time?

00:30:21

RE: I think in the old days they probably just seasoned them with salt 'cause a lot of the older crowd will buy with just the salt. It's the newer crowd that likes the seasoning, and it's really a mixed crowd though. You know everybody likes the seasoning. I guess in the past year the seasoning has—has been in there, so they've always bought it, but I would say in the older generation—older days it was probably just salt.

00:30:44

SR: And you continue to make the crackling—we talked about this a little yesterday—even though there isn't much profit in it. You continue to make it—why?

00:30:52

RE: It goes hand in hand with the boudin, and—and the old traditions, you know. I'm known for having cracklings here, so I do cracklings. It's—I would really like rather not do them, you

know. I mean I don't do enough to justify someone back there—again and the issue is labor—in order to do that. We don't do as much—I know they got, they got some shops that do several boxes of cracklings. Now the profit margin on that is not the greatest thing. It probably pays maybe for a meat cutter in a week's time if they do enough of it, but I mean everybody who buys boudin usually likes to buy cracklings with their boudin, and just—it's just a traditional type thing.

00:31:36

SR: When you showed me the boudin in your cooler, we saw—there was a hog hanging in your cooler. Tell me about that, and also what—how you were talking about, people bring their deer in. What is that part of the business?

00:31:46

RE: Well that's another issue when you got a small grocery store. You got people—there's no place to take your deer anymore. People want it cut up and not just de-boned. I mean I always took care of my own deer, but it was de-boned. You know, I didn't have a saw or nothin', so you got to take it somewhere and there's not too many places that do it anymore. The same thing with the hog, you know, like we do hog killings. I mean we don't do the killing—hog. They bring it in in an ice-chest, and we'll—we'll hang it to chill it down, and then we'll cut it for them. They won't—for the most part, you know, I charge just a small fee just to hang it, and they can come get it. Sometimes we cut it. We—we don't charge that much per pound, you know. We charge it by the weight, and then—and then we'll cut it up for them and throw him back in the ice chest, and they're on their way. You know if they want it wrapped—hardly anybody wants

their own stuff wrapped; they can wrap it cheaper than I can wrap it for them. I mean even paper is expensive these days, you know, and we're killing too many trees these days.

00:32:41

SR: So what other kinds of animals might people bring in besides the hog and the deer?

00:32:44

RE: That's about the only two things. Every now and then I get goats, you know. You've got the foreigners that come in here with goats. They won't—they won't buy anything unless it's a goat. You know, they don't eat pork or beef at all. That's beyond their religion. And they'll—they'll come in with goats because it's not too many people—you can't buy goats in a box no more. Or you might be able to buy a lamb, but lamb has gotten to where it's so expensive—you know you're talking \$12 to \$14 a pound—and they'll bring us a goat and we'll cut it up. They'll bring it in the ice chest and we'll cut it up and throw it back in the ice chest and then take—they'll be on their way with that.

00:33:17

SR: Do you feel—I mean a lot of what you do is—. **[Phone Rings]** Go ahead; I'll pause this.

[Pause during which Richard Elliott walks to the back of the store to check on his cooking cracklings.] We're looking at a crackling here that has just been through its first cooking.

00:33:32

RE: And when I talked about earlier about how the first cooking and second cooking—outside this crackling would have popped. But back there it doesn't pop; it just blisters. And then when you take it and refrigerate it and then drop it back into that hot grease with that cold being right there, it just kind of makes it—it just pops it like popcorn. And that's—that's where it comes out. That's what you call a good crackling. But see, like this here, it's not good because it's—it's not popped yet.

00:33:57

SR: It's just the skin blistered, huh?

00:33:57

RE: Just the skin and the fat is just—just a cooked crackling is all it is right now. But the minute you go, and you're going to take that crackling and refrigerate it and get it up to cold temperatures—at that point, and then drop it in that hot grease and it will just—you can hear it 'cause it will just snap, crackle, and pop just like Rice Krispies.

00:34:16

SR: And how long does it take them to pop?

00:34:19

RE: Oh, you're only cooking it there—they're already cooked; it's just a matter of popping them. You're only talking about maybe four minutes.

00:34:24

SR: Wow, do you have any idea what is happening when it pops?

00:34:28

RE: It's just the skins; it's like anything else that's really cold. It's like throwing—it's kind of like you having a hot thing of grease on the pan and sprinkle you some water in there. That's exactly what's happening. You know it just—it's just igniting it. Anything cold like that it just makes it pop.

00:34:45

SR: Huh, like the moisture—.

00:34:48

RE: I don't— don't know the—what we'd call that—the terminology for why it does that. It's just kind of like a—the skin, and that's what's popping is in the skin. It's kind of like when you see those other cracklings on the shelf that's made by Frito-Lay—it's popped. You can actually buy that—you can actually, these—these are hard rinds. They're probably about a half inch by half inch, and throw it in hot grease and they just balloon; they just pop—all—and just balloon up real, like Frito-Lay sells, those pig skins. It balloons them out like that; kind of expands them to where it's just kind of crunchy.

00:35:26

SR: Huh.

00:35:26

RE: I don't know why it does it. I'm not the—I'm not into biology that much to know why it does that, but it just—I just know it does.

00:35:35

SR: I haven't tasted those commercial brands very much. What's the difference in taste?

00:35:41

RE: They're not real. [*Laughs*]

00:35:42

SR: They aren't real. What are they?

00:35:44

RE: It's like going to Wal-Mart and buying the meat and coming—coming here and buying meat. It's not real. That's just my explanation. Now you're getting real meat there; it's just a difference—and yeah, like I was telling you, it's gassed up—gassed up meat. And if you want to buy gassed up meat, continue going to Wal-Mart. If you want real meat, you know that's cooked—cut by a person who's back there, and a person you can actually see doing it, you know—. And it's also a gratifying situation on your part when you go back there and look at a meat market 'cause you can go back there right now and look at my meat department, and even—I've cut all morning long; everything is white still, you know. I clean up, you know, and

that's part of what you have to do in a market that's not refrigerated. You got to keep it clean all the time, you know, and—and that's what's to me is the best thing about having a meat counter like that. At Albertson's everything is refrigerated so bacteria doesn't grow below—in 32-degrees back there, but neither does your bones and your knees and your elbows and stuff like that, and after so many years it works on you. And that was another reason why, you know, you get out of stuff like that. It's not only to be, for your,=for being your own boss; it's for your own health reasons.

00:36:55

SR: Uh-hm.

00:36:55

RE: Because, I mean even with that—Delchamps was 32, 38-degrees back there in that cutting room, and they got to have it that way. But then these small guys back here like myself, you can't afford to have something running like that, you know. The electric bill is already high enough without having to add to it all the time.

00:37:12

SR: You just have to clean really well and—?

00:37:16

RE: Yeah, just clean well and when I came here all they did—and that's what they did in the old days. They had a bucket of Clorox and—and water and a rag and wiped everything down.

Well when I got here I added on to the back, which you saw back there in the back where my crackling room is. And off to the right I have a wash area where I put the saw on wheels, and I put everything on wheels I can, and they take it to the back; they rinse it down, sanitize it, bring it back in. And the blocks are brought to the back and rinsed down and sanitized and brought back out, and then they're Cloroxed again. So I mean it's a sanitation thing, you know, which is everywhere right now. You know, you have to be. There's germs growing everywhere.

00:37:51

SR: And there are a lot of restrictions for you, yeah?

00:37:54

RE: Board of Health—Board of Health reasons, yes. I mean they don't require—they require some things like that, but those who have been in business for a while, they—they're kind of grandfathered in on a lot of things and stuff that the public doesn't know. They've been educated pretty good through the past through *60 Minutes* and all the other kind of shows like that—that kind of accelerate, you know, they scare you more than they do anything. And in some instances they probably need to be scared, because I've seen some stuff in the past where, you know, people throw stuff into sausage where it should be discarded, and—and that happens. And it's—and that's why you have things that happen to Wal-Mart and Albertson's and Winn Dixies, and where they don't—they don't grind meat anymore. They get it all pre-packaged like that because of those reasons. You know, it's like a hamburger. The hamburger scare is because it's grinded. You know a steak, the bacteria is on the outside. Once you grind it it's on the inside; that's why you got to cook it well, you know. If you take the grinder out of the markets, they

don't have that scare so much. You're always going to cook the outside of your meat well. But the minute you grind it, that's when the scare comes in, and—and that's why a lot of your markets don't have grinders in them anymore, because they get it—they put the—how they say it?—they pass the buck on the big companies that bring it in already grinded for them.

00:39:12

SR: Right.

00:39:12

RE: You know, so even sausage—they don't even do—some places don't even do the sausage. They have people like me that get into that business and—and make sausage and just, you know, distribute it to them. It's—it's a financial issue, but if that's what's being done—. You know I think Comeaux's in Lafayette is doing that for Albertson's right now. It used to be Johnson Sausage, and they displayed all their fresh sausage to them. But here we make all kinds of varieties. I make a barbeque sausage; I make a fresh sausage; I make a mixed sausage; I do my own smoking mix to hot and mild sausage. But you know after each time you do something, you wash and clean your grinder and you make it sanitized, you know. It's got to be sanitary or people wouldn't come back.

00:40:01

SR: Right. What's a barbeque sausage?

00:40:03

RE: It's just a—it's a regular fresh sausage, a regular mix. The only difference is we put some barbeque sauce in it, and it gives it that barbeque flavor.

00:40:12

SR: Can you tell me: what's the difference between just a regular smoked sausage and an andouille sausage?

00:40:18

RE: Well I mean, it's not a whole lot of difference in it. You got some natural flavoring that can go in there, and that's basically what we do. We do only a pure pork andouille sausage with natural flavoring to it. Our regular pork sausage is just seasoning and ground-up pork. You know I put a little bit of celery salt and just a little few extra things into it. And I don't make the original andouille because we don't—I don't put all that ingredients in there. You may find some of the really old timey grocery stores that are still in business, they do that—they might do that. I think a lot of people have gotten away from it because it's just so time—time involved. But andouille was a—pretty much a mix of the whole kitchen sink going into it, you know, off of a cow, and you know we don't—maybe slaughterhouses and stuff like that might still do it, that have their own shops in their slaughterhouse, which is very far and in between now. But as far as here, no, we don't do that. I just put a natural ingredient and keep it plain and simple and put it in a bigger casing.

00:41:17

SR: Okay, yeah, so it's fatter?

00:41:18

RE: Yeah, it's more of a—it's a size of a silver dollar casing instead of a size of a quarter casing.

00:41:26

SR: And what kind of wood do you use in your smoker?

00:41:28

RE: Hickory, pecan, or oak, you know, depending on whatever I get. I have a neighbor that—that's in the tree business, so I didn't ever have to pay for any of it, so he furnished all his odd cuts, so we always had green wood. So that—and that's an issue there, is having green wood and not just old wood, just smoked anything you know, and—and that makes a difference.

00:41:48

SR: What kind—what do you mean? What kind of difference? Can you explain what—?

00:41:51

RE: Well green wood, it smokes. You know when you say smoked sausage, it's not cooked sausage; it's smoked sausage, and that's where a lot of people go wrong. When they're smoking sausage they got a big old flame in there and it's cooking it, you know. You can—you can cook smoked sausage in two hours if you got a big enough fire and enough heat in there, but if you want smoked sausage in there when you got smoke. You know I have a flame probably the size

of your foot, you know, that's heating up the place 'cause it takes 12 hours—or anywhere from 8 to 12 hours—to smoke a load of sausage. And I have a small area, so it don't—you know during the wintertime we're smoking every day. You know sometimes around the clock, 'cause we can't keep up when it gets cold, but—but there is a difference. Some people smoke sausage, and I call it cooked sausage because it's—it's not smoked much; it's just mainly just cooked, you know, with a dark brown flavor because of the smoke that was in there. We sometimes even change out the fire to where it's another log—we throw another log on there to make sure it gets a good—a good smoking. And that's why I'm successful here with my smoked products, because it—it does taste smoked.

00:42:53

SR: And can you tell the difference, personally, like if you used hickory versus pecan or oak in a sausage?

00:42:59

RE: Not really. Not really. I mean I—I mean you may have those who are die-hard smoked fans, but I—you know if I had to smoke one to the next one, I can't say I would taste any difference.

00:43:13

SR: And so we were looking through your meat department earlier, and there's some very interesting products that you don't find in other parts of the country. And one thing was, you had

a package of ingredients together that would make a cowboy stew. Could you tell me what those ingredients are, and what cowboy stew is?

00:43:35

RE: Yeah, cowboy stew is—is in old-timey days when you did cochon de lait, when they had the leftovers, which is almost the whole kitchen sink after the—the heart, the liver, the kidneys; you had the tripe mixed in with it; also marrow guts was a big issue. For a long time you couldn't get marrow guts because of the mad cow disease. They've just now started where we can get that now, and that was a main ingredient for cowboy stew. But it hurt a lot of people's feelings, but then they realized what the reason was behind it and they kind of agreed with it, but it's back now. So I mean, we don't have a problem getting it, but yeah—it's just, it's the whole kitchen sink. Once you did a--I don't know if you ever went to a cochon de lait, where I mean everything is not wasted, I mean down to the ears. I mean everything is used. I mean and sometimes—sometimes they put brains, and I mean the whole—like I said, the whole kitchen sink is put in it.

00:44:30

SR: And then, well first of all can you tell me what marrow guts is?

00:44:35

RE: Marrow guts is come from the—from that backbone—not the backbone, the spinal cord-type thing. And that's what the mad cow disease was bad about it, because of that spinal cord, and you know all that's—you just couldn't get it because of the—because of that issue, and

that's why it was taken away. But now that they've—the FDA has allowed it to come back and it's back now.

00:44:58

SR: And so people take those parts, and what do they do with them to make a cowboy stew?

00:45:04

RE: Well different people do different things. They either stew it, or they'll fry it and then stew it. But most part of it is stew in a black pot—best way of doing it.

00:45:14

SR: And so do y'all eat that at home?

00:45:13

RE: No, I try not eat none of that stuff. I just don't—I just don't eat it. I mean it's—it's great food. You know I was tricked one time to eat tongue, and I just don't eat—I just don't care you know—. Once I ate it, it was great, but I just—just one of those mind things. I just don't eat it.

00:45:30

SR: And do you sell a lot of that, cowboy stew mixes?

00:45:35

RE: Absolutely. I do a lot of it yeah.

00:45:35

SR: And who's the main cook in your house?

00:45:40

RE: I used to be, but now, since I've had the store you know, my wife is more—doing the work now.

00:45:45

SR: But you—so you're not from Louisiana, but have you adopted Louisiana cooking traditions at home?

00:45:51

RE: Oh definitely, and I think all men adopt the Louisiana traditions. I think if you really put aside, you know, the—the ladies got—I don't want to put nothing on the ladies, but a lot of times ladies specialize in one or two items, where a man seems to—he seems to kind of adapt it to the Louisiana cooking, and he loves—he loves to cook for the most part for some reason. They've just adapted to different things. Some of the ladies won't cook this or that. Well the guy will always step up and—and cook it one way or another. But you know some ladies—some ladies can do it all. I don't give—you know the men can't—you take one man and one woman, and one man can't cook a darn thing. Well guess what? The woman has to cook it, so one has to be dominant in either area. But for the most part, yeah, I think a lot of men are adapted to the Louisiana way, you know. I don't know if it's because of the sportsman area where they—

they've kind of gone out and did their own cooking and—and that may rely only in the wild game area 'cause I think they can do—I think men do a lot better job with the wild game than women do.

00:46:51

SR: It's interesting though, because if you—I mean I'm originally from Wisconsin, and there's a lot of hunting in that area, but I can't—there aren't very many men who are cooking. There must be something about it down here that just is really appealing.

00:47:05

RE: Yeah, but it—when you go down there you don't see—. I don't know. You know I've been—I've had a lot of camps, and you don't see no women on the camps; they don't hunt most of the time. And duck hunting is strong around here, deer hunting is strong, squirrel hunting is strong, and you get about 10 or 12 guys together and they just—they learn how to cook. I mean if they don't know how to cook they learn, you know, because sooner or later they have to cook for the camp—one time or at one point in time, unless they absolutely ain't no good at all, and then they're just kicked out. **[Laughs]** If they ain't going to learn at all—so it's just one of those issues where you've learned since you was a kid, because most of the time you grew up as a sportsman and you learned it through the—. And I pretty much probably learned a lot of my cooking from, from just doing it you know. The Cajun way is—is something that's, you know you don't see anywhere else but down here. Even when you--Paul Prudhomme—and Emeril, you know, he'll talk about how the Cajun food is predominant in this area, and you go somewhere else and they call it Cajun but it ain't Cajun. They don't know how to cook it, you

know, 'cause they wasn't brought up cooking it. And that—that's something that's brought from a younger age and brought up, and more likely it was brought up from the grandmother stage, you know. She showed everybody else, so—.

00:48:25

SR: So do you feel like a Cajun at this point?

00:48:27

RE: Just what they call a half-ass coon-ass. You know, one of those deals. [*Laughs*]

00:48:34

SR: What a title.

00:48:34

RE: That's it.

00:48:37

SR: But your kids probably identify as Cajun.

00:48:39

RE: Definitely. I don't—yeah, I would say they would. I don't know if you'd want to call them Cajun now. You know when you go in the school, the schools don't teach Cajun a much as they used to. Now it's Spanish, so I mean it's—it's one of those issues where I think the heritage is

going south; just one of those deals that—that Spanish is more of a culture coming in than it is Cajun. So, and you see more Spanish restaurants coming up more than you see Cajun restaurants coming up, you know. And so it's just one of those issues where times are changing.

00:49:10

SR: But you come into a place like this, and I mean this is a real preservation-type place. And I know that you bought it to have your own business, and it's a business venture for you, but do you feel any sort of responsibility to the community to carry on some food traditions?

00:49:29

RE: In a sense, yeah. I mean you got—you have a lot of people that come in here that—from Sunset—that I think they would admire me and remember me as Richard Elliott: he helped me out one time or another. And that's a pat on your shoulder more than you got at Albertson's, you know, or the Delchamps, or the other bigger towns, because there's nobody there to pat you on the back. Or if it is it's a quick pat; *now get back to work*, you know. It's one of those deals. I would think it's a lot more gratifying over here 'cause you have—you have the elderly and you have the younger crowd, and the—if somebody comes in, *Well I ain't got the money for this. Can you loan it to me until tomorrow?* Or sometimes they came in late at night—*Just take it and pay me tomorrow*. And they'd look at you like, *Is this for real?* You know, and I catch that every now and then. And I said, *You know what? What I just did, nobody else does that*. I don't think anybody has ever done me that way, you know where I'll go into a place and they'll say, *Well pay me tomorrow*. And that's exactly what I've done several times, you know. And they're here the next morning to pay for it. I was closing up and didn't feel like opening up the register or

whatever I needed to do and—and you don't see that no more. No, you don't see it at all. If you do, it's very far and in between.

00:50:42

SR: Well you were telling me yesterday that Sunset used to have a pretty high concentration of little markets.

00:50:50

RE: Right. It was, from what I understand from the—the history of Sunset is it was a walking town or a buggy town, you know. There was no automobiles that much, and there was several grocery stores. And from what I understand it was either four or five stores in the community, and that—that community the store was in is where they got their business from because people had to walk to the store. So if you're on one side of town you might not have saw that one person that lived on the other side of town. But you had to have a store on that side of town, because it was too far for them to walk to get to that store. So it was—so there was stores that popped up in different areas, and now you have two stores. You have one big store and you have myself. You have a couple little gas stations in town, but as far as a grocery store—a full grocery store like I am here; you know, produce, meat, groceries, and boudin and cracklings—I mean there's only two of us in town.

00:51:40

SR: So the other one is—I don't know how to pronounce it. Is it Janise's?

00:51:43

RE: Janise's, yes.

00:51:44

SR: And that used to be right across the street, huh?

00:51:47

RE: Right, he was right across the street and he saw the—he saw the light to want to do more business, and he had the opportunity to be able to build. And I can't say I wouldn't have done the same thing if I had an opportunity to spend a couple of million dollars to do so. *[Laughs]*

00:52:04

SR: How long ago was that?

00:52:05

RE: I would say about two years ago, so—.

00:52:10

SR: So they were right across the street when you bought this place?

00:52:11

RE: Right, they were across the street. They were there for about four to six months before—before they left.

00:52:18

SR: And have you had more business since then from people who live in walking distance, or how—how has it affected your business?

00:52:27

RE: It's came and gone. It—some months is good and some months is bad. It just—it's one of those deals where, I mean I can't compete against him 'cause he's got—he's probably got 10,000 different new items than I got, you know, 'cause of the size I am. He's got a lot bigger frozen food area than me, but he don't have that specialty in meats. And he does do a lot—he does a good job in stuffing, and he does a good job in his meat section. In fact, he's got a fellow worker that worked for me at Delchamp's as his market manager over there, so I mean he's—he's doing a good job. It's just that, you know, he may not have like I was talking about with Albertson's—you don't have that personnel to say, *Hey, Don, could you fix me up this thing?* And not saying he don't, but it's not likely that they'd have—like they'd come into a smaller place and, *Richard, you got my stuffed pork chops? Yeah, I'll be right with you, you know—got it right now, or whatever.* And you know—don't know the person because he's back there cutting, and he's back there tending to his business 'cause he's doing a lot more business than he's got—he's got a lot more employees to watch over. I have two guys to watch over, and they watch me over more than I watch them. So it's one of those issues where, you know, it comes down to labor again; making time for your customer.

00:53:35

SR: Well I mean I—I noticed just in the short amount of time that I've spent here, you've—I've seen you at the cash register, seen you with the cracklings, and I've seen you straightening on the shelves. So you've pretty much covered a lot of the store.

00:53:53

RE: Yeah, when you say manager and owner—owner and manager, it's exactly the same title. You do everything. Well fortunately I've done everything with Albertson's in—in the previous 30 years in the grocery business, so the hard part was doing the bookwork end of it, you know, when I took the grocery. And that part, you never can catch too well, and that's where my mother-in-law come in and helped, and she really helped me a lot with that.

00:54:18

SR: And so do you live in Sunset?

00:54:20

RE: No, I live on the other side of Scott.

00:54:25

SR: And how old are your children?

00:54:27

RE: I think I got one that's 21, 18, and one that's 15.

00:54:32

SR: Wow.

00:54:35

RE: I got one starting to be a freshman this year; one is at LSU; and the other one has got a—a real job now.

00:54:42

SR: Well congratulations.

00:54:42

RE: And they're all still home periodically, so—. [*Laughs*]

00:54:43

SR: Do any of them work here ever?

00:54:45

RE: I had them all at one point in time working for me, but it's not good to have family working for you. [*Laughs*] I trained them well, and they went about their business, and everybody that—that they worked for now said they were excellent workers. And I said, *Well I'm glad I did my job then.*

00:55:00

SR: But there's no one who you think—none of your kids are wanting to take this over some day?

00:55:04

RE: Definitely no. They—they just don't have the grocery in them. You got to have it in you. You got to have it in you and—and the want for it, and they just don't have it. I mean they—they got their lives; they know what they want. Now if they wanted grocery, it would be there; if they wanted to be a meat cutter, it would be there. It's what you want to do in life. And as—it's hard—it's one out of ten, one out of twenty-five, that will want to be a meat cutter, you know, that I've trained right there. And like I said, since I've been here, in three years that's been what? 160-some people I've—I've hired here, and I've gone through about five or six meat guys. You know it's just—it's a labor issue; it's a fight every day.

00:55:45

SR: Yeah, I just wanted to—I'm going to let you go here soon 'cause I know you have a lot of work to do, but I wanted to ask you a couple more loose-end-type questions. We were talking about how in this area a lot of men cook, and it made me think that I haven't met any women boudin makers. Have you, in your—in your years in the food business?

00:56:03

RE: I know there is a couple out there that I've heard of and seen that's—that's running little markets, and they're running really small markets. But how much they were doing, I don't know. But they're there—but they're far and in between too.

00:56:20

SR: Yeah. I'll have to keep my eyes peeled. And one last thing: I just wanted to ask you to describe how you serve your boudin. I mean, first of all, how you cook it. You kind of showed me back there that you cook it in a brown gravy. Tell me a little bit about that, and then also how you wrap it.

00:56:39

RE: Yeah, well after it—after it's in the chill down process, [before] serving it's got to be cooked. The casing is what's got to be cooked. The meat itself is cooked already. So what you're doing, you're warming it up, so actually what we were just doing is warming it up in boiled water. We add a little bit of the gravy sauce to it—brown gravy in the can that—and it's just a tab, just to give it more or less a color 'cause you don't want white boudin, you know. A lot of people make white boudin, but it's—that's not good to have, so we put a little bit of gravy mix in it to—to give it a little—and that probably gives it a good little taste to it, too also. But anyway, you heat that up and then you put it in—in a rice cooker and that's just for the warmth. We don't cook it from a rice cooker. A lot of people cook boudin from a rice cooker, and warm it up from the start—from cold to—and that's not good either 'cause, to me it just dries it out, you know. And then from that point it's kept warm, and when the customer asks, on an individual basis we wrap it, and we wrap it in the old-time white paper, you know. It just—I've kept that tradition. We still have—I have a regular wrapping too, a film wrapping that I do on the meat case, but a lot of the over-the-counter wrapping is done with the boudin, 'cause I mean I do anywhere from three to six hundred customers a day, and half of that is—is boudin customers.

00:58:00

SR: And how many of those do you think eat the boudin right away, and how many take it home?

00:58:03

RE: Hmm, they probably eat it right away. Boudin is not good cold.

00:58:09

SR: Do you ever make—you mentioned boudin balls that you make for festivals. Do you ever make boudin balls here?

00:58:15

RE: I make it here; I just don't cook it here, because I don't have the fire suppressing systems, you know, set up for that. I don't have a kitchen—yet. I'm working on it, but if I—if I had that then I would sell a ton of boudin balls.

00:58:27

SR: Well how—really quickly, how do you make a boudin ball?

00:58:29

RE: Boudin balls and boudin is the same; the only difference is you're taking the same ingredient, rolling it up about the size of a silver dollar or a little bit bigger, and roll it in flour

and then deep-fat frying it in the same—you could use peanut oil. I mean, but to me it tastes better from crackling—from hog lard. And that’s how we do it at the—at the festivals: we cook it in hog lard. But it only takes just. more or less just a heat-up stage again, cooked probably about anywhere from two to four minutes just to—just to cook that flour. But it’s an excellent product cooked like that.

00:59:07

SR: Okay, well thank you for giving me the time. I know that you don’t have a lot to spare, so I appreciate it.

00:59:14

RE: Not a problem.

00:59:16

[End Richard Elliott-Boudin Interview]